

The Froler Case

FROM THE FRENCH OF J. L. JACOLLIOT.

By H. O. Cooke.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. W. VAN DEUSEN



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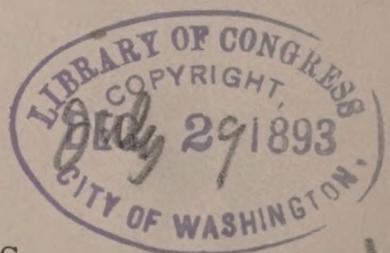
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THE FROLER CASE.

PART FIRST.

A MYSTERIOUS ASSASSINATION.

Monsieur de Vergennes, the chief of Police in Paris, was entering the Hotel de le Prefecture about one o'clock in the morning on his return from the Opera, where he had accompanied his wife and daughter. When about to conduct the ladies to their rooms, he saw his confidential clerk hastening towards him. The young man seemed a prey to such strong emotion that Monsieur de Vergennes, struck by the agitation displayed in his features, rapidly descended the

few steps which he had already mounted, saying :

“ Well, Sylvan, what has happened ?”

“ An awful affair, Monsieur,” replied the young man hurriedly. “ Jacques Froler, the chief of the Detective Service, has been assassinated in his private office not five minutes ago. The police agent who gave the alarm has gone for the doctor. I had just time to order that no one should be allowed to leave the building and come in search of you.”

“ And the murderer ?”

“ Is being searched for in every corner of the hotel, and we are certain to secure him, for he has no possible means of escape.”

An extraordinary excitement which, like a swell of the ocean, seemed to increase each instant, was soon heard on all sides ; at that moment the police agent, Bousquet, who had been the first to give the alarm, returned with Doctor Bourdon, one of the doctors attached to the Prefecture. Monsieur de Vergennes ran up to them, followed by his secretary, and the whole four silently mounted to the unfortunate Froler’s office, which was situated on the second story of the building.



JACQUES LAURENT RECEIVES HIS VISITORS.—*See Part I.*

Monsieur de Vergennes was a man of about forty years of age, tall, distinguished looking, affecting in his dress and manner of wearing his mustache the style of a French cavalry officer; very shrewd and diplomatic, he had, notwithstanding many changes of ministers, displayed great skill in retaining in position. It must also be confessed that never had the police force been confided to better hands. Monsieur de Vergennes possessed the rare faculty of reading his subordinates strong points and employing them according to their particular aptitude, saving their strength on ordinary occasions, in order that he might tax them to the utmost of their power in cases of difficulty and danger. Above all, he understood how to avoid any wound to their *amour propre*, any conflict of services—those habitual dissolvents of the best administrations,—and he had ended by gradually surrounding himself with a band of choice men not to be equalled in Europe. These were the good times of the French police, and the exploits of the detective service reflected still more renown on the brilliant achievements of their chief and rendered his position impregnable to such a degree that the Prefecture of Police

counted for naught without Monsieur de Vergennes, so completely were the functions of the office identified with the man. It can easily be imagined then with what emotion, although he allowed nothing of it to appear, the Chief heard of the crime which was to deprive him of one of his most valuable assistants.

Jacques Froler had been head of the detective force for ten years, after having successfully carried out not only the business within the jurisdiction of his own special service, but also that which concerned political or private interests with which he had been entrusted, without ever having had to register one failure.

Active, intelligent, of tried courage, devoid of prejudice, despising men from what his own experience and the police records of the Prefecture had revealed of them, having, besides, the gift of divining correctly at first sight and conceiving a plan, which he executed immediately, with a rapidity that scarcely left his adversaries the time to reflect.

The loss of such a man was irreparable! This was, at least, the opinion of Monsieur de Vergennes on hearing of the crime which had just been committed.

On entering the office of the Chief Detective, the Chief of Police and his companions beheld the unfortunate sufferer lying on a mattress on the ground, which had been hastily brought for him, supported by two police agents who were kneeling beside him, while Luce, the assistant chief, held a sponge soaked in cold water to the wound in his back, and in which the dagger with which he had been struck still remained. No one had dared to remove it before the arrival of the doctor.

"He is still alive," said Doctor Bourdon, after a rapid examination. "But that is all; his heart beats very feebly and his pulse is quite still."

"Then there is no hope?" anxiously inquired the Chief of Police.

"I cannot hold out any," replied the physician, who was examining the wound. . . . "the blade has penetrated the lungs between the fourth and fifth ribs and must have caused inward hemorrhage, against which the resources of art are of no avail."

"Then he will die without speaking. . . . without naming his murderers?"

"According to all probability, Chief, yes; yet curious things sometimes happen in a case of

this sort; the more I examine the wound the more it appears to me a mortal one. At the same time, if the blade of the dagger has not penetrated any vital part, and the internal hemorrhage which I dread is not taking place, not only may he be recalled to life, but there will be a chance of his ultimate recovery."

"Heaven grant it may be so, doctor."

While speaking, the doctor had not been idle; he had skillfully cut away the clothes of the wounded man, and after having prepared the bandages, lint and other appliances which he considered might be necessary, he carefully proceeded to extract the dagger from the wound; a dangerous operation, which might cause immediate death. But it had to be done, for the pulsations of the heart were growing fainter.

Policemen had crowded into the room in spite of the Chief's presence, and every moment agents came to render to Luce an account of the different precautions which had been taken to prevent the escape of the murderer, whom they were now certain of capturing, as no one had left by any of the numerous exits of the vast building since the fatal event.

The doctor with a gesture, called the attention

of Monsieur de Vergennes to the crowd which kept increasing, thus interfering with the freedom of his movements and at the same time heating the atmosphere to a degree hurtful to the wounded man.

The Chief ordered the office to be cleared; in an instant the only remaining witnesses, with the exception of himself and the doctor, were Luce and the two police agents supporting the body.

The doctor seized firm hold of the dagger with his right hand, and with the two first fingers of the left pressing the wound together, he drew out the blade slowly, gradually, smoothly. . . . Suddenly he stopped, and the assistants saw him change color.

"What is it, doctor?" demanded the Chief, who watched this scene with painful anxiety.

"Look," said the surgeon. "I have already drawn out twenty centimeters of blade and there is still some left. Besides, it is a flame shaped dagger, and wounds from this sort of weapon are always mortal. . . . he cannot survive ten minutes!"

"In the name of Heaven!" said Monsieur de Vergennes, "try to revive him, so that we may at least know the name of his murderer. . . ."

"Then we must make the most of the last spark of life remaining."

With these words, the surgeon, breaking through his usual measures of prudence, quickly drew out what still remained of the poignard sticking in the wound, and holding together the opening, he allowed the blood to trickle out slowly, in such a way as to relieve the left lung, without in any way risking the flow of the dreaded hemorrhage.

The doctor's experiment proved as successful as the desperate situation rendered possible: a few instants later, and the sufferer sighed as he opened his eyes. His lung, relieved from the blood obstructing it, allowed a hoarse, whistling sound to escape, but at the same moment, a blood-stained foam appeared at the opening of the wound. The surgeon evidently viewed this as a very serious symptom, for he said in a quick tone of voice to Monsieur de Vergennes :

"Make haste, if you wish him to speak. . . ."

Then, he added, in a lower voice :

"It will be all over in five minutes!"

"Froler," said the chief. "Can you understand me?"

The dying man responded by a sign in the affirmative.

Monsieur de Vergennes continued :

“Take courage, my dear fellow, your case is far from hopeless.”

“Don’t lose any time, Chief,” said the doctor in a low voice, “at any moment it may be too late.”

On his side Froler had made a gesture of dissent on hearing the Chief’s words ; his eyes shone feverishly as he opened and closed them in an agony of pain and anxiety, and his right hand moved as if feeling for something near him.

“Quickly, a slate,” said Monsieur de Vergennes suddenly, a bright idea occurring to him ; “he evidently cannot speak, and wants to write.”

A look of relief brightened the old detective’s countenance on finding he was understood ; he comprehended the full gravity of his position and did not wish to die without the hope of being avenged.

The order of the Chief had been attended to, and a police agent placing himself by Froler’s side, held the slate firmly, so as to permit of the latter writing without fatigue.

"You know your murderer?" demanded Monsieur de Vergennes of the wounded man.

The latter replied by a sign in the affirmative, and with difficulty stretched out the hand holding the pencil to the slate which the agent held out to him.

A painful emotion wrung the hearts of those present. Froler was visibly sinking. Would he be able to write?

The surgeon made him inhale some strong salts, which appeared to revive him, for the pencil was heard to scrape against the slate, and two letters were the fruits of this first effort "D. E." The chief had not time to find out the meaning of these two letters, for the unfortunate Froler had stopped, breathless, exhausted, again placed the pencil on the slate, and with unequaled energy, consecrated the last effort of his expiring life in writing the name of the one who had struck him this cowardly blow but it was in vain, death had interfered to deprive him of this supreme satisfaction. Scarcely had he traced in a feeble manner the letter "M." . . . when the pencil dropped from his hand, his head fell back, and with one last

convulsive spasm of the body he was no more.

At the same moment, the police agents on the night watch, who had searched every corner of the building, came in, rather ashamed of the fact, to announce to the Chief their complete failure, "and yet," they said with earnest conviction, "the assassin could not have had time to escape."

Another very important statement corroborated their words: two of the sentinels placed on guard at the different entrances of the building, declared that at the moment the order arrived not to allow any one to pass, a stranger had presented himself at the two little eastern gateways, but had returned on finding he could not pass. This man, the police agents insisted, must certainly be the murderer, and the reason they had not been able to secure him was that he must have taken refuge in that part of the building inhabited by the chief, which they had not dared to search without his instructions. As to the appearance of the individual who had wanted to pass, the two guards could not describe him, for Monsieur de Vergennes must remember that these particular gateways were

placed at the end of two narrow staircases, which were never lighted after office hours, also the two sentinels, never guessing the importance of the order received, had contented themselves with calling out, on hearing the sounds of steps on the staircase: "No one allowed to leave by this door," without troubling themselves about the person whom they had not even seen. At the same time, a circumstance worth noting, both men had remarked the rapidity with which the stranger had retraced his steps.

After this verbal report from the police agents, the Chief agreed with them in deciding that the assassin could not yet have left the building; he gave orders to have the body of the unfortunate Froler carried to the infirmary of the Prefecture, unwilling to pursue the enquiry in presence of the still warm body of the victim, and only retained with him Luce and those who had already taken part in the search.

No one having been allowed to leave the Prefecture, the crime could not have been yet made known in Paris, and it was of importance that matters should proceed quickly, so that the capture of the murderer should be announced at the same time with the committal of the crime.

Monsieur de Vergennes was very sensitive as to the criticisms of the press, and he thought over the effect which would be produced when the news of the assassination of the head of the detective force in his own private office, surrounded by police agents, was announced, if they were reduced to the necessity of confessing that the assassin had escaped. He already saw in the daily papers these remarks: "How can honest tradesmen retire for the night in peaceful security, when in the very headquarters of the police, one of their own number can be stabbed with impunity, under the watchful eyes of their intelligent agents, who push their complaisance so far as even to countenance the departure of the murderer. . . ."

"If I do not get the villain who stabbed Froler in my power before this night passes," he argued to himself, "there will be nothing left for me to do but send in my resignation to the minister, and not wait until he asks for it, so strong will public opinion be against me."

Then addressing his assistant:

"Monsieur Luce," said he to him, "at the hour that Froler's murderer is arrested, I will sign your appointment as head of the detective

force. I hope you may be more fortunate than your agents, in the new perquisition you are about to undertake. When you have gone over all the rest of the building, I will accompany you to the apartments set aside for my own particular use. Take great care of this slate on which poor Froler wrote the three letters—D. E. D.—. . . in order to hand it over to the magistrate, for if they are the first three letters of the Christian name or surname of the assassin, it will be equivalent to a formal designation of the murderer by his victim. Now I think of it, how did this fatal event take place? I have had no time, since I returned from the opera, to question any one regarding it."

"We hardly know more than you do, Monsieur. I had remained a long time with Froler, talking over the affair of the Rue Montorqueil, our first failure for several years, which, however, does not prevent the papers from attacking us daily."

"It would be a much more serious matter if Froler's assassin escaped us."

"Oh! as to him, Monsieur, I have no fear; we shall have no difficulty in finding him, hidden, probably, in one of the corners of that part of

the hotel reserved for your especial use, for I defy him to pass any of the gates so long as the order is not withdrawn. . . . But about the explanations you asked me for. I had just left Froler, and was on my way to change the men for the night, when suddenly we heard a dull sound as of a body falling in his office ; the agent, Bousquet, who was near the door, opened it quickly and rushed in just in time to see the opposite door, communicating with the passage leading to your secretary's office, close. Without troubling about Froler, who was lying full length on the carpet, and whom he left us to assist, Bousquet dashed like a bomb-shell at the second door, but it resisted all his efforts, the assassin had had presence of mind to push the bolts on the outside, which you had placed there to break off, when it suited you, all communication on that side with your apartments. While the police agents descended in a crowd to the central court in order to gain the opposite wing, which the murderer would have to cross before he could make his escape, I warned Monsieur Sylvan, your secretary, who immediately sent the order interdicting any one from leaving the building. Two minutes had not

passed since the event, an altogether insufficient time for the murderer to reach any of the exits from the spot where this mysterious assassination had been perpetrated! . . . We had just lifted up Froler and laid him on the mattress, hastily brought over from the infirmary of the Prefecture, when you arrived with Doctor Bourdon."

"That is enough. I shall have a host of questions to ask you yet, but they are of no consequence unless the murderer happens to escape; it is useless, then, to waste time just now, when it is so much more urgent your search should be continued. Take what men you consider necessary, and let me know when you have visited all the building except the rooms reserved for my use."

With these words, the Chief left his subordinate, he was anxious to reassure his wife and daughter, whom he had left more than an hour ago.

When alone, Luce gave free vent to the impressions which he had been obliged to restrain until now.

So at last this position of Chief Detective is vacant, the place I have been ambitious to fill

for the last ten years, and which Froler obtained by the most glaring injustice A few hours more, and this brigade, so renowned for its discipline and intelligence, will be under my direct authority I will undertake to make it accomplish wonders. Of course, Froler was clever, I don't question his ability, but he had one great defect for a detective, he did not know how to listen to the advice of those around him, so anxious was he that all important captures should be due to his skill alone. And then, if love of the profession had not overruled every other consideration with me, how often would we not have had to submit to some terrible failures, had we followed his directions but what is the good of dwelling on the past. Here I am at the height of my ambition. May he rest in peace! . . . I must go now and cage my bird; the poor devil who has been the cause of my becoming Chief of the Detective Force without knowing it, was certainly ignorant that it was only necessary to press an electric button and at every exit the following order would appear on a board: "No one allowed to pass out without further orders." Had he guessed as much, he would never have allowed

himself to be caught here like a rat in a trap But what could have been his motive? Certainly we are not wanting for enemies, we detectives; but ordinary malefactors do not hate us to the degree of murdering us; they know we only pursue them because it is our trade, and not from feelings of personal hate; so I should not be astonished if this proved to be an act of private vengeance from some higher source. Chief detectives are at times in possession of grave secrets, in which the honor of the highest families is at stake; in such cases, a man must know how to shut his eyes, hold his tongue and forget without that, he is pitilessly sacrificed to those superior considerations before which our insignificance is of little importance I do not believe Froler was capable of abusing a secret known to him alone and coming to his knowledge during the performance of his duty, but his interest being brought into play, he was just the man to make the value of his silence felt; his one ambition was to die in the Council of the State, and that might have been against him. It is not twenty-four hours ago that he said to me, with a meaning wink: "Luce, this time I have secured my seat; they

cannot keep me out of it any longer!" What could poor Froler have had to sell but his silence? Not understanding the silliness, the utter folly of such an ambitious dream, he must have insisted too much. . . . And they have put him out of their way! . . . But of what serious importance the affair must have been to drive them to such lengths? Well! . . . What am I about, dreaming in my turn and building up a romance on an adventure to which I shall have the key in a few moments in my hand."

While thus reflecting, Luce was walking up and down the office awaiting the return of two police agents who had accompanied the bearers of Froler's body to the infirmary, for he could not begin his researches without them Suddenly his attention was attracted by a shining spot which sparkled a few steps from him on the carpet; to stop his walk and pick up the object was the work of a second. Judge of his astonishment when he beheld in his hand a magnificent diamond stud, worth at least five or six thousand francs. . . . Such a jewel could never have belonged to Froler, nor to any of those who had been in the office that evening, excepting, of course, the Chief; but Luce put that sup-

position aside at once, for Monsieur de Vergennes had assisted the doctor when he was examining Froler's wound, and had pulled up his shirt sleeves for the purpose, thus necessitating the removal of his studs, which he had placed on a corner of the desk, and Luce had distinctly noticed that they were made of mother-of-pearl, having a count's coronet with the arms of the Vergennes family engraved on them.

But, then, how had this brilliant got there? With his keen detective scent Luce was not long in finding an answer to this question. The diamond could only belong to the murderer, unless, indeed, it had been found in the possession of some offender and handed to the Chief by one of the police agents who had arrested him; but this last hypothesis was not a very probable one, for it would have been placed in a secure repository when received, and on Luce inspecting the register where these sort of articles were instantly noted down under the double signature of the police agent who handed it in and the Chief who received it, the register bore no trace of such a deposit!

"This looks serious," muttered Luce thoughtfully. "Were my suppositions of a few moments

ago nearer the truth than I suspected? In any case, something tells me that this affair will not prove so simple as it appeared at first and to begin with, I very much fear the assassin will succeed in evading us in spite of all our precautions who knows even if Monsieur de Vergennes? That would surpass everything! . . . but it would not be the first time such a thing happened in any case, I must keep my mouth shut and be patient!"

At this moment the two police agents re-entered with Doctor Bourdon, who had come to write out his report.

Luce requested him to do this in the private secretary's office, who was to remain there all night, then having placed a sentinel at both doors of the Chief Detective's office, immediately began the perquisition about the success of which he was not now so sanguine.

With the exception of the agents of the force, those who were on guard at the different posts, the few employees who lived there, and the servants of the Chief, the vast building, generally so full of life and movement during the day, was now silent and almost empty, the excitement consequent upon the assassination of Froler had

by this time completely subsided, a deep silence reigned in those long passages and sombre corridors, out of which opened the numerous offices of the different services of the police. Luce did not leave the smallest corner, cupboard, or chimney without examining them with the most minute care, and in order that the supposed assassin might not be able to take refuge in the parts already searched a guard was placed at each crossing of the corridors and at the top of each staircase.

Commencing in the cellars and basement, the search was carried on up to the attics without leading to any results. There now remained only the private rooms belonging to the Chief of Police. A profound feeling of vexation could be read on the faces of the police agents who, without exception, looked for no good results from this last part of their search ; there was very little chance that the murderer would have dared to penetrate into any places well lighted and occupied, where he could not take a step without running the risk of exposure and recognition.

Informed of the unsuccessful issue of the search, Monsieur de Vergennes betrayed such

disappointment that Luce could not help muttering between his teeth :

“ If the Chief is in the secret it must be confessed he plays his part to perfection.”

Monsieur de Vergennes accompanied the party himself through his private suite of rooms, although feeling quite persuaded in advance of the uselessness of the proceeding, having already made his servants search his apartments; but he wished that Luce also should make an investigation, so that he would be in a position to say so in his official report. Everything was to be dreaded from the malignity of the public, which very little sufficed to arouse: the comic papers would not be sparing in their caricatures of this case, probably representing the assassin on his way to gormandize in the kitchen of the Chief of Police, while the intelligent police agents was chasing after him in the cellars.

There was only the drawing-room remaining, in which were Monsieur de Vergenne's family. . . . The agents exchanged looks of profound discouragement, and the Chief appeared completely overpowered by the failure. Luce

alone kept his impressions to himself and remained impenetrable.

"I think it is useless to disturb the ladies," he said to his Chief; "the murderer would certainly never have dared to enter the drawing-room while they were there."

"The crime had already been committed when we returned from the opera, my dear Luce," replied Monsieur de Vergennes. "I must insist, then, that all my rooms be carefully searched. . . ."

His subordinate bowed and followed the Chief, accompanied by his men.

The Chief's wife and daughter, a young girl of about eighteen years of age, were not alone; an old man with a fine face, a distinguished bearing, and still vigorous in appearance, although he must have passed his sixtieth year, was sitting with them.

On perceiving the stranger, Luce involuntarily started; it seemed to him that this was not the first time they had met, and like a flash the thought crossed his mind that this man might have played a part in the assassination of the Chief Detective. But before he had time to collect his thoughts and consider this idea,

with one word the Chief of Police destroyed his scarcely conceived suspicions by presenting him to his father-in-law, Monsieur de Marsay, Judge of the Supreme Court.

All idea of the complicity on the part of the old man in the crime just committed vanished immediately from Luce's mind, but the name of the judge proved to him that he was not mistaken in supposing he had seen him before.

“ De Marsay ! De Marsay !” he murmured. “ What a strange meeting after a separation of thirty years ! It is indeed he, but does he wish to recognize me ? Yes, if he had nothing to do with what happened to my poor brother Oh ! I must find out if really for then it would be the justice of Heaven which delivers him into my hands” He could no longer continue this inward monologue, for the introduction having been gone through, the old judge said to him with reference to the murder committed such a short time before :

“ A very sad adventure for everyone, Monsieur Luce, and which will have a disastrous effect on the very impressionable population of Paris.”

“ Above all, in the presence of the failure of

our search," replied Luce, darting at Monsieur Marsay a questioning look laden with memories of the past.

Monsieur de Vergennes' father-in-law seemed as if he did not understand, and continued with the greatest coolness :

"How do you explain to yourself, having taken the necessary precautions, that the murderer has been able to escape from the building?"

"I cannot explain it, Monsieur; it is impossible that the murderer could have gone faster than the telegraph. I still believe he has not escaped from here besides, we have proof that he made an attempt to get out in vain."

"You have this proof?" exclaimed the old man, with imprudent eagerness, which Luce did not fail to notice.

"The devil!" he reflected. "Here is an old fellow who obstinately refuses to recognize me in spite of the signs I make him! Yet he cannot have forgotten me, and then, he seems to take a very lively interest in the flight of our assassin we had better keep our eyes open Nothing will get the idea out of my head that



THE FINDING OF THE LOST JEWEL.—*See Part I.*

Froler has not been assassinated from any ordinary motive”

These thoughts had pressed through Luce's brain with the rapidity of lightning, and his answer to Monsieur de Marsay was not delayed to any noticeable extent.

“Yes, sir,” he replied, “we have that proof, and you can judge yourself of its value: two of our agents have declared, separately, that very shortly after having received the order, interdicting the passing out of any one, a stranger had tried to leave the building by the two eastern gateways, but had quickly retraced his steps on meeting with this opposition Without doubt, that man is the murderer we are in search of! That is not all, chance has put in my hands another proof of the first importance to us detectives. . . .”

Luce never finished his sentence. An incident rapid as a flash of lightning on a dark night, an incident as terrible as it was unexpected, had literally frozen his powers of speech.

What was it that had taken place?

While replying to Monsieur de Marsay he had taken his pocket-book out of his pocket, with the intention of handing to Monsieur de

Vergennes, as a convincing proof, the brilliant he had found in Froler's office, but the jewel, without his knowledge, had dropped and rolled noiselessly on the carpet, and everyone's attention being directed to what he was saying, the fact escaped the notice of all the occupants of the drawing-room, when suddenly Monsieur de Vergennes' young daughter bent down quickly and gave an exclamation of joyous surprise.

"Grandfather," she cried, "here is your stud which we looked for so carefully only a moment ago."

And in her hand, between her rose-tinted dainty fingers, she held out the sparkling jewel.

Under the shock of the violent emotion caused by these words, Luce was on the point of committing himself but with the rapidity of lightning, he had calculated the immense importance of the scene which had passed under his eyes, and quickly realized that above all he must conceal every evidence of the impressions agitating him. Never in his long experience as a detective had he ever found himself in such a terrible position and, perhaps, in spite of the power he possessed over himself, he might not have been able to recover from the mental

shock he had received, had not Madame de Vergennes afforded him the time and chance of fully appreciating the exceptional gravity of the incident.

“It is indeed one of the studs we gave my father on his last birthday,” she said, after examining the diamond, which she had taken from her daughter’s hands, “besides, we can easily compare them,” she added, holding out the stud to the old judge.

The latter, without the slightest apparent hesitation, took the jewel, replaced it in his cuff, saying in the most natural manner:

“Quite unnecessary, my dear, this brilliant is the one I dropped here this very evening. I am glad we have found it; but do not let us waste the time of these worthy fellows, so valuable to them in their present search. . . .”

Then addressing Luce:

“You were saying, Monsieur, that you had discovered some important evidence,—calculated to put you on the track of the guilty man; am I not right?”

This question which was put with the greatest coolness, recalled Luce to the necessities of the situation; he had only one end in view now, to

leave the Chief's apartments and regain his own room so that he might have time to think over the events of the evening in peace. Since that episode of the diamond, which had suddenly thrown such a singular light on the sinister crime of which Froler had been the victim, Luce, his head on fire, saw nothing of what was passing around him in Monsieur de Vergennes drawing-room, and he devoted what strength of mind remained to him in repressing the tumultuous impressions which were confounding his ideas, as a gust of wind whirls about the dry leaves on a dusty road.

Overjoyed at finding the stud, the Chief's family had not paid any attention to what was taking place, and Monsieur de Vergennes, who knew the value of the jewel which his father-in-law had recovered, found his own attention distracted for a moment from the sad forebodings which had assailed him in consequence of the daring murder, the perpetrator of which seemed to have made his escape.

An old police agent, called Heurtloup, who was Luce's most confidential assistant, was the only one of all those around who had noticed the extraordinary emotion of the latter when the

Chief's young daughter had found the lost diamond. Although the reciprocal relations of the two facts had absolutely escaped him, yet like the old bloodhound he was, he put this, among other events, aside in a corner of his brain until he could find the key to it; he made up his mind not to forget these two circumstances, connecting them with the fact which was occupying the attention of everyone,—the assassination of Froler,—although at the time, they did not seem to have any direct bearing on the crime committed. It had so frequently happened to him during his now lengthened career as a detective, to fit together threads which seemed absolutely foreign to each other, that he did not despair of one day finding the connecting link which would reunite these two facts into one common whole.

Luce, who had gradually regained his composure, comprehended that he was expected to give a direct answer to the question which the old judge had put, since he had challenged it by affirming that he was in possession of important evidence which would put him on the track of the murderer but what could he say? The detective found himself in a corner, without any apparent means of escape! To speak of the

diamond was impossible, for that would be tantamount to accusing Monsieur de Vergennes' father-in-law of Froler's assassination, without any other proof than his own word. He might in vain declare that the jewel he had found in the Chief Detective's office had escaped from his pocket-book at the moment he was going to hand it to his chief. Every one would have declared that the diamond had been picked up by the young daughter of Monsieur de Vergennes, and his own accusation might be turned against him. And then, how could he make any one believe that a judge of the Supreme Court could be guilty of such a crime? Admitting even that the diamond had been found in Froler's office, what serious result could ensue from that fact? Above all, when the social position of the owner of the jewel was taken into consideration? Monsieur de Vergennes' father-in-law loses a valuable stud somewhere in the Prefecture de Police; it is clear he cannot indicate the exact spot where he met with his loss; he became aware of it in the salon, but it might have happened in the passages or even staircases, as well as in the private apartments, and might it not happen that Froler had found this dia-

mond on going to his office, and that he had not had the time to make enquiries about the rightful owner before the murder had been consummated, of which he had been the victim? In truth, it was inadmissible that an accusation so grave as that of murder could be established on such a fragile basis! . . . So, while secretly suspecting Monsieur de Marsay of having something to do with the mysterious assassination of the Chief Detective, under the strong impression made upon him by the episode of the diamond, Luce, returning to a healthier appreciation of the facts, comprehends the danger of his situation if on mere suspicions, that nothing so far justified, he accused Monsieur de Marsay in the presence of Monsieur de Vergennes, his son-in-law. He could not dare either to incriminate the judge of the Supreme Court, unless in full possession of proofs, and these proofs, although his detective instincts assured him he would end by finding did they exist, he was not in possession of at this moment. It was certain that Monsieur de Marsay's diamond could not have found its way alone to the unfortunate Froler's office, and, more, on examining the sentinels, Luce had also acquired the knowledge

that the Chief Detective had already been more than half an hour at the Prefecture when Monsieur de Marsay had entered by the principal gateway; that entirely excludes the hypothesis that Froler had found the jewel; but all this, although sufficient to serve as a basis for an enquiry which Luce meant to set on foot, would have vanished into thin air if a serious and definite accusation had been made on such slight grounds.

The situation was a most unheard of one. Without having exchanged one word which would have led to the betrayal of their real sentiments, without any of those present at this strange scene suspecting it, the two men had become mortal enemies, and old memories to which no one had the key provided nourishment for their mutual hatred, as well as the suspicions relative to the murder of Froler, that de Marsay instinctively felt hovering over him in Luce's thoughts, and from there the determination on the part of the Judge to force the detective to speak, in order to know what these proofs and evidence consisted of to which Luce had made allusion; while, on his side, the detective was equally determined to be silent regard-

ing the crime committed at the Prefecture, with the hope of forcing De Marsay to his last refuge, namely, to appeal to the old relations that had existed between them.

Monsieur de Marsay feared nothing from the present ; nevertheless, an enquiry conducted by a detective of Luce's trained skill might bring to light a dark spot in his past life, and it was this he feared. What he desired before everything then, was to know if the detective had any serious intention of accusing him ! In the course of the conversation which followed the scene about the diamond, he found the opportunity he sought for to force the detective to explain what he meant by the important evidence he asserted he had discovered against the murderer.

The question had been skillfully put to Luce, as if seconded by Monsieur de Vergennes ; the detective felt the snare, for he could not refuse to give any explanations the Chief demanded, but he quickly resolved to make them redound to his own advantage.

After giving his adversary a look which signified, "I shall say nothing, and you shall know

nothing" he replied, in the coolest manner.

"*Mon Dieu !* Monsieur, you have given more importance to my words than they merited. I allowed myself to indulge in a series of deductions more or less hypothetical, which is a habit we detectives have of indulging ourselves in when in presence of a crime which has balked our first search ; what would be the use, then, of repeating idle suppositions to you which may never be realized."

"You did not speak of suppositions, Monsieur Luce," replied the Judge in the cold tone of a man who holds his adversary in his power, "but of '*important evidence*,' to repeat your own words which are fresh in the memory of us all. I beg you to observe, then, in this case, that the mysterious circumstances which have accompanied the assassination of Monsieur de Froler, the place where the crime was committed, the daring escape of the murderer,—for I persist in believing that he has succeeded in escaping,—all combined, make it your duty to speak out and tell us what you have discovered, for you have discovered something important, your own words prove that. Reflect on this, that your silence,

in this case, justifies any suspicion, even that of complicity!"

Monsieur de Marsay had shown great skill on starting. He hemmed in Luce between the obligation of explaining his words or the alternative of admitting that he had spoken rashly ; it was a master-stroke which must fatally lower him in the eyes of Monsieur de Vergennes and deprive him of the position of Chief Detective that he had so long and ardently coveted. Luce, acting under orders, would be no longer dangerous, for he would have nothing to do with the direction of any search. The detective could not help appreciating the skillful tactics adopted by his enemy, when suddenly carried away by the heat of his argument. Monsieur de Marsay had allowed the unlucky accusation of complicity to escape him, thus losing all the advantage he had previously gained.

"I have got him," thought Luce, and without giving the old judge time to correct the disagreeable impression he had produced by these latter words, he drew himself up, erect, pale and indignant under the insult, and addressing Monsieur de Vergennes, who had made a gesture of protestation to his father-in-law, and with the

skill of a finished actor he said, in a voice trembling with suppressed emotion:

“ Monsieur le Prefet, I have served under you for thirty years, examine my record, search the testimonials your predecessor gave me, as well as those I have received from you, and tell Monsieur le Judge that during that long period of time, not once have I had to submit to punishment or blame, but that my services have been rewarded by honorable mention in the orders of the day, seven medals, and the cross of the Legion of Honor. . . . If after a whole life employed in the defence of society, I can be suspected with impunity before you of complicity in the crime committed this night, it only remains for me to send in my resignation.”

Luce seemed to experience difficulty in enunciating the concluding words, and terminated his speech by choking down a sob with a skill that would have awakened envy in the breast of the most able melodramatic villain.

Heurtloup, with clenched fists, actually wept with helpless rage at the sight of his chief's grief.

Monsieur de Vergennes was deeply moved by this protest from one of the oldest and most

faithful servants in the service. So his first effort was to appease him.

“Come, come, my dear Luce, you mistake the true meaning of my father-in-law’s words, which in no way were intended to cast a reflection on you. Simply giving expression to a general idea, Monsieur de Marsay wished to say that all the employees of the force, who did not declare openly what he knew regarding the event of this night, would expose himself to being reproached with moral complicity. . . . Believe me, my dear Luce, that such were his thoughts; and for my part, I repudiate even the very shadow of an imputation against your loyalty.”

“I thank you, Monsieur,” said Luce sadly, “for trying to pour a little balm on my wound the blow went straight to my heart, and I felt it deeply. Be good enough now, Sir, to allow me to withdraw with the rest of my men. All my searches having been until this moment without effect; I must at once take measures to facilitate the discovery of the guilty man.”

“And here is something,” replied the Chief, handing him a folded paper, “to invest you with more authority and contribute to the success of your efforts.”

"An order with reference to some important service?" questioned Luce mechanically.

"No, my dear fellow," said Monsieur de Vergennes, smiling. "It is your appointment as chief detective which I have just signed."

"What, Monsieur! You have been good enough! . . ." exclaimed Luce filled with joyful surprise.

"Yes. Contrary to what I had originally decided, I have concluded that this position was one of too great importance to remain vacant, and then I wish to bestow this mark of my confidence on you by not keeping you waiting for an appointment to which you had a prior claim before our unfortunate friend, Froler. . . . At the time of his appointment there was some one high in influence who wished to pay some old debt, at least so I have heard, for I was not chief of police at the time. . . ."

"Your information was correct, Monsieur," interrupted Luce, "the president of the Supreme Court wished to recompense Froler for a great service he had rendered him formerly, a service the true nature of which was known only to themselves and Jacques Laurent, the late Chief Detective." . . . As Luce concluded

these words he directed a questioning glance at Monsieur de Marsay, but the old judge never moved a muscle. "He persists in not recognizing me," thought the detective; "let me see," and he continued aloud: "Some of you will remember that mysterious adventure, known only to those concerned in it, under the name of the Mill of Usor, and which excited so much indignation at the time. If my memory does not play me false, the principal actor in this adventure was a young lawyer from the provinces, who had just been promoted to the magistracy in Paris, but whose name unfortunately I do not remember, who narrowly escaped losing his position, and more than that . . . his life!"

As he uttered these last words, Luce surprised a rapid contraction on the old judge's brows, but that was all. . . . If Monsieur de Marsay had played any part in that mysterious adventure, he was evidently determined that the knowledge of it should remain buried in the past! . . . Luce saw this also, but he did not try to put the old man to any further test, being convinced that he was not mistaken, and that the old judge of the Supreme Court, was no other, with thirty years added to his age, than

the young lawyer, De Marsay, who had been mixed up in the affair of the Mill of Usor, in which they had both nearly lost their lives. At that period, in spite of the distance which separated a magistrate near the tribunal of the Seine, from a simple Inspector of Police, the two young men that death was on the point of uniting in the same tomb, had sworn an eternal friendship the very day when Jacques Laurent, the celebrated detective, who was then living in retirement, had saved them at the last moment. Since that time they had never met; for the day following, Luce had been named Central Commissioner of Police at Cayenne, where he remained for twenty years, and Monsieur de Marsay was sent away, in disgrace, a simple judge, to Clermont; but, while our detective was forgotten at Cayenne, Monsieur de Marsay, thanks to the all-powerful protection of the Duc de Gerçy, president of the Corps Legislatif, and godfather of his wife, was quickly recalled to Paris, where they gave him back his position as *Juge d'Instruction*.

It must be acknowledged that Monsieur de Marsay's first thought was of his young companion in misfortune. On arriving in Paris he

had hastened to his protector with the hope of interesting him in Luce's behalf, but the sceptical old politician had at once begun by laughing at him, and as the young magistrate insisted, speaking of his gratitude, of dangers shared and supported together, the duke replied :

“ My dear boy, you are a simpleton, and I excuse you, because you have only just arrived from the provinces. Were it not for that, you ought to know that the influence of the President of the *Corps Legislatif* must not be exercised indiscriminately. . . . In social life, my dear De Marsay, do not forget this : Everything gained by accumulated work, or through influence, has a relative value. When you demand this last means which you have not acquired by the former, it is only fair you should pay the difference ; I demand payment for my credit, and do not throw away my services. . . . For you it is a very different affair. You are the husband of my charming god-daughter, whom gossiping tongues go so far as to call my own daughter, and you have a claim on what influence I possess ; but beyond that I cannot go, and you must not ask me to do anything for strangers. . . .”

The young magistrate, although he found

the godfather's conversation slightly cynical, accepted the decision, and ended by forgetting Luce who, offended by his silence, ceased to write. . . . They never met again until thirty years later in Monsieur de Vergennes' drawing-room : Luce, now a man in all the maturity of his fifty-two years, and Monsieur de Marsay, although still hale and strong, on the threshold of old age. If this long period of forgetfulness alone had come between the two men they might have been able, in spite of the social distance which separated them, to exchange a clasp of the hand and speak of the pleasures of a past for which neither of them had cause to blush, although the ardent illusion of youth might have led them in former times to play with the honor and happiness of two powerful families. . . . But De Marsay had done more than forget. Under circumstances which will come to our knowledge later, he had allowed his heart to become hard and devoured by ambition, and had lent himself to criminal machinations which had plunged the family of Luce in grief, despair and poverty. . . .

Up to this day, Luce had not been able to gather any proofs against De Marsay, and had

absolutely refused to believe in his quiet; but the absolute silence the latter had affected during this interview in the Chief's drawing-room, had opened his eyes, and at the moment he hardly entertained a doubt but that he had before him the villain to whom was to be attributed the ruin and dishonor of his people, and the episode of the diamond had ended by giving rise in his own mind to the gravest suspicions regarding the participation of the Judge in the daring murder of the Chief Detective.

Promoted to the post which his ambition had for such a long time desired, Luce was all the more glad of it now, as it would enable him to discover the source of the odious plot hatched against his brother, and the authors of which, thanks to powerful influence, had managed to evade all his investigations. And then he had for so long a time believed in an impartial judgment from the Court of Assizes, that nothing less than the inexplicable conduct of his old friend, Monsieur de Marsay, was necessary to give rise to suspicions which his respect for the decisions of justice had made him stifle in his heart. Strange coincidence! His enemies had promised themselves to disappoint him in his candidature

when the post of Chief Detective became vacant, but before they were even informed of the fact, a glaring imprudence on the part of one of them, a generous impulse on the part of Monsieur de Vergennes, had just conferred on Luce that power, all the more to be dreaded that it enabled him to act with almost uncontrollable liberty.

Monsieur de Marsay was not laboring under any delusion regarding the danger of such an appointment, but his son-in-law's decision had been taken and executed so rapidly that he had not had time to oppose it. He promised himself, however, after Luce's departure, to employ all his influence with Monsieur de Vergennes to make him alter his decision. Luce, on his side, who guessed his enemy's thoughts, was in haste to be at liberty, so that he could hasten the publication of his appointment in the *Moniteur Officiel*, which was issued every night, and thus render it irrevocable.

In this singular situation of two men who had parted as devoted friends, and who met again after a separation of thirty years without ever having seen each other during that long period,—now mortal enemies until death,—we have been obliged to follow the development of their indi-

vidual sensations from the moment they found themselves confronting each other in Monsieur de Vergennes drawing-room ; read, so to speak, their looks and interpret their sentiments ; for this mute scene played by the two adversaries before the Chief of Police and his family, who were quite unconscious of what was passing before them, was the first act of the sad and mysterious drama to be unfolded in this recital.

On parting, the two adversaries guessed pretty accurately the state of each other's feelings ; above all, they were convinced that the struggle had already begun, and was to be continued without pity or mercy, and both were eager to give the first blow.

For the moment, the appointment of Luce put an end to all discussion, and the new Chief Detective received from the Chief of Police orders to put in the field the most shrewd of his bloodhounds, and not to spare himself, but to get as quickly as possible on the traces of Froler's murderer.

The perquisition accomplished in the interior of the Prefecture, and the explanations exchanged in the Chief's drawing-room, had lasted a much shorter time than might have been expected, for

relieved from the insight into matters which we have been obliged to give in order to present to our readers two of the principal characters in this story,—Luce and Monsieur de Marsay,—the official meeting had not been prolonged beyond the time necessary to verify the researches made by the police agents, and to the few words exchanged on both sides relative to the finding of the diamond and the short war of words carried on between Luce and Monsieur de Marsay.

At the moment when the new Chief Detective was taking leave of Monsieur de Vergennes, the latter signed to Luce to follow him into his private office. There, after having assured himself that no one could overhear them, the Chief begged him to be seated, and began in an agitated voice :

“ Luce, you have now attained the height of your ambition, but I fear that your elevation to this post, so long aspired to by you, may be the signal for my disgrace ! ”

“ Oh ! Monsieur le Prefet . . . for a mere act of justice that I have waited for for more than fifteen years ? . . . ? ”

“ You do not understand me, Luce ; allow me to explain. I have nothing to fear from your

appointment, although the post was one eagerly sought for, and very high influence to name only one of your enemies, the Duc de Gerçy"

"The President of the Corps Legislatif?"

"The same. Although the highest influence, I say, has already been employed in advance to exclude you from the possibility of ever obtaining the position, still I am sure of the approval of the Minister of the Interior. It is not eight days ago since the conclusion of that little affair, which won for you such a brilliant success, where all the European police had failed, he told me that in order to prevent all complication, the decision I must arrive at when the time came for Froler to retire, must be to appoint you, he called an act of reparation. . . . So you see, my dear Luce, I have nothing to fear from your appointment. Only, you are not aware that my position is being eagerly sought after by members of my own family."

"Is it possible, Monsieur le Prefet?"

"It is exactly as I say, my dear Luce."

"And for whose benefit?"

"My own brother-in-law's."

“ Monsieur Paul de Marsay, the solicitor-general?”

“ The same. His father, whom you have just left, destines him for a high position.”

“ What age is he?”

“ About thirty-two years.”

“ Yes, that must just be about it. I remember the little Paul was eighteen months old when his father dragged me into that fatal affair of the *Moulin d'Usor*, which has had such a disastrous effect on my whole life.”

“ What! that young magistrate you spoke of a moment since?”

“ Became your father-in-law.”

“ But he did not seem to recognize you?”

“ That is true, Monsieur le Prefet it is a business which he and I must come to some understanding about, and if the adventure but this is not the moment. . . .”

“ You are right,” interrupted the Chief, who divined that they were treading on dangerous ground. . . . “ Let us return to the business on hand.”

“ Solicitor-general at Trente for two years, and filling the same position in Paris,” soliloquized Luce. “ Monsieur de Marsay must be

rather difficult to please if he is not satisfied with his son's advancement."

"What I tell you is true, nevertheless! and he has entered into a plot with the Duc de Gerçy, who refuses him nothing, to make him a Minister of Justice within two or three years."

"Well, excuse my plain speaking. . . . but how can that affect your position?"

"That is what I am about to explain. Paul's advancement has been so scandalous that it is difficult to think, for some time to come, of assigning him a more elevated position on the bench. Then the Duc de Gerçy cannot speak of him in the House as a keeper of the seals before he is *procureur general*, which defers to a rather distant period the fulfillment of his ambitious projects. Now this is what they have resolved to do in order to get out of the difficulty. Although tradition and custom does not permit of the Solicitor-general being made Keeper of the Seals, it is very different when it relates to a Chief of Police."

"Ah! Now I begin to understand all!" exclaimed Luce.

"They have decided, therefore, that I am to hand in my resignation in the interests of the

family; Paul is to become Chief of Police in my stead until he can pass from the *Boulevard du Palais* to the *Minister de la Justice*. Then they propose to give me back my former position. Before confiding this project to me, the President of the Corps Legislatif wishes to win over the Minister of the Interior to his side; but he met with unexpected and determined opposition to his plan. 'Never!' said the Minister to him. 'I absolutely refuse to remove Monsieur de Vergennes from a position he has filled with so much skill to the satisfaction of every one; this Chief has worked marvels during the ten years he has been there; swindlers driven out of Paris, the faubourgs purged from the lawless crowd of ticket-of-leave men, all that impure world of bullies and depraved women pursued with the utmost rigor of the law, and the tranquility of Paris assured both by night and day. Surrounding himself with a chosen band of employees, leaving no crime unpunished . . . there, in a few words, is the work of this trusted official whom you ask me to remove, for I have no equivalent position to offer him, even would he accept such a compensation. It is impossible, my dear Duke. I would prefer sending in my

resignation rather than deprive the country of his services etc.'

"So you see, my dear Luce, I am well supported by the Minister; but in spite of that, the Duc de Gerçy refuses to look upon the business as hopeless. He came to me, begging me to send in my resignation, explaining his reasons for doing so, and on my refusing to comply with his wishes, did not hesitate to threaten that he would compel me to send in my papers and would conquer the obstinate opposition of the Minister. . . . Yesterday, my dear Luce, I did not fear him, but the last twenty-four hours has wrought a great change. . . ."

"How so, Chief?"

"You do not seem to comprehend what the consequences of Froler's murder may be to me?"

"I understand that your enemies will certainly not remain idle, but they cannot in any way incriminate you on account of this crime."

"Yes, they will reproach me for not having secured the murderer; with all the more reason apparently, that the crime was committed inside the Prefecture in the midst of police agents of every grade."

"It is precisely this circumstance, and because

of the number of agents that were there, that you ought to be held innocent of any reproach of negligence or incapacity."

" My enemies will have recourse even to the most unlikely actions ; you know it, Luce, where passions or interest are at play. Of course, they will not attack the force, nor you, you last of all, of whom Jacques Laurent has said that after himself you were the one detective with genius of the century ; but they will maintain that if I had not paralysed your efforts, by wrongly insisting on taking the direction of the search, the murderer would not have escaped. . . . You did not see the evil smile of my father-in-law when he spoke of the harm this escape might cost me. . . . How can I hold my own against the combined attacks of the press, my family and the Duc de Gerçy ? At the first evidence of public excitement, I will receive orders to discover the assassin or send in my resignation . . . and I dare not, do you hear, Luce ? I must not leave the Prefecture of Police at this moment."

As he said these words Monsieur de Vergennes lowered his voice and glanced around him in an uneasy manner, as if he feared some

spy might overhear what he was saying, while such a distressed look came over his face, and he turned so pale, that Luce was frightened.

"What is the matter, Chief?" he said, with some emotion.

"I cannot tell you, Luce," he replied. "This secret, which concerns the honor, nay the life, of one of the oldest families in France, does not belong to me, and to divulge it would entail dire consequences. One morning, the Duchess de la M. came here almost mad with grief, threw herself on my mercy, crying out: 'Save me! *Save us!* Monsieur de Vergennes, or I will poison myself here before your eyes!' The unhappy woman had a little bottle of prussic acid, which she held convulsively in her right hand, and which she could easily have swallowed before any one could have had time to prevent her What could I do? Acting on my first feeling of compassion,—an imprudent thing for a man in my position to do,—I promised, and for three months I have been secretly at war with two delegates and a part of your brigade, Luce, in order to avert an enquiry ordered by the Minister himself."

"And you succeeded, Monsieur?"

"Perfectly, my dear Luce . . . I may even add that I won the approval of those high in power; of that I am certain. But I must succeed in arresting the murderer of Froler; if I do not, as you can very plainly see, I shall be dishonored and abandoned. . . ."

"It is always so with affairs of this sort; a man may consider himself very fortunate if in case of failure you are not regarded as an accomplice."

"That is exactly what I dread, Luce. You understand, that at any cost, I must not give up my position as Chief of Police."

"You will not have to give it up, dear and honored master; let me call you this as a proof of the esteem and affection we all bear toward you."

"Thank you for your good wishes and sympathy, Luce; but if Froler's murderer is not discovered within forty-eight hours, public opinion will be against me, and you know that there are cases when the strongest power is obliged to yield to its demands."

"It was not merely a wish I expressed, Chief, it was a certainty I meant to convey: you will

not have to resign your position. I can promise you that much."

"And who is to accomplish this miracle? for it will be nothing less than a miracle which will keep me in my post with such powerful enemies against me. . . ."

"I will!"

"You, Luce!" said Monsieur de Vergennes, almost dumb with astonishment.

"Yes, Monsieur, I!"

"Alas, my poor Luce, however great the confidence I place in your word, if you have not found the assassin by"

The detective, who above all things wished to reassure the Chief so as to keep up his courage, decided on a bold stroke so he interrupted him with these words

"The assassin! I have already discovered him!"

Monsieur de Vergennes gave a bound and looked at the detective as if doubtful whether he was speaking seriously.

"Yes," continued Luce, before the Chief had time to recover from his astonishment, "from the very first moment I guessed where the blow came from, and I would have had the murderer

arrested, if I had not considered that not having taken him in the act it was wiser not to secure him until I had got together such proofs that it would not be possible to deny his guilt. . . .”

“ You are a very valuable man, Luce, and I believe you, for I have never known you to speak falsely ; but what was the use of going through the form of making such a vigorous search, and, above all things, why wait until now before telling me ?”

“ You understand too well the outs and ins of our trade, Monsieur le Prefet, not to be satisfied with the few words I can say. We have not been alone one moment since the murder was committed, so it was necessary for the plan I had conceived that no one should suspect that I knew the assassination ; if they did, the villain would escape the punishment he so justly merits and remark this well, Monsieur le Prefet, that I dare not affirm that he may not even yet escape ; but if he does, it will be under certain conditions which I shall impose, and which he will have to accept. . . .”

“ You alarm me, Luce. As far as I can understand, Froler’s murderer does not belong to the common category of professional criminals, who,

as a rule, only seek for vengeance for previous condemnations. . . .”

“ You are right, Monsieur le Prefet. If I can judge from the position of the guilty one, Froler has fallen a victim to a plot hatched in a high quarter, and the end of which I do not yet see.”

“ And the name of this man ?”

“ I cannot divulge it !”

“ What ! not even to me ?”

“ Least of all to you.”

“ I am not very much surprised at your decision, judging from the tone you have adopted.”

“ I beg of you, Monsieur le Prefet, not to feel offended at my refusal. Suppose that the crime was in reality directed against you, by those of such high social standing that you could do nothing against them ?”

“ My God, Luce, what is happening ? what do you mean ?”

“ More than I have a right to tell you, Monsieur le Prefet . . . : Do you still insist ?”

“ No, Luce !” replied Monsieur de Vergennes, much moved “ I divine, I foresee some terrible infamy behind all this. . . . You are right, it is better I should remain in perfect

ignorance . . . and I must trust to you, my friend, to defend me, if am indeed the one they intend to attack."

"Have no fear on that score. So long as I am alive, they will never meddle either with your position or your person . . . Allow me now to leave you, for I must, at any sacrifice, begin my work at once before anything transpires outside!"

"One word yet, Luce. Our conversation has deviated from the business on hand to such an extent that I was going to allow you to depart without confiding a most important matter to you."

"I am ready to listen, Chief."

"You know that my brother-in-law has led rather a fast life?"

"Yes. I know even of certain acts of his that if they had not been hushed up through the credit and purse of the old Duc de Gerçy, might have conducted him to a very different position than that of Solicitor-general."

"That is true! Froler, who knew all about it, more even than I did, and who had divined the project of my father-in-law and the Duc de Gerçy relative to the position I hold, was in the

act of preparing a little statement regarding Paul de Marsay, destined to be submitted, at a given moment, to the proper authorities, so as to make his candidature a failure. . . .”

“That was only fair.”

“Well, this statement, which Froler, from motives of prudence did not keep at the Prefecture, you must find the means of securing this very night in his own house, before his death is made public, and seals, as is the custom in the case of all Chief Detectives who die while discharging their duty, placed on his papers.”

“It shall be done within an hour.”

“I leave everything to you . . . under any other circumstances, I would shrink from having recourse to such means to defend myself, and would have left my brother-in-law and his supporters to the infamy of their attacks, but I have explained to you why I cannot leave the Prefecture at this moment . . . what misfortunes . . . what deaths . . . what irreparable ruin! . . . If I were not there to watch and follow the enquiry step by step, trying to mislead them in their researches . . . Ah! it is a very terrible position to be in, Luce.”

As he uttered these words, Monsieur de Ver-

gennes dropped his head between his hands and remained for some moments plunged in deep thought.

Meanwhile, the detective had risen to take leave of his chief precious moments were passing, and he had made up his mind to interrupt the meditations of the latter, when a light knock was heard at the door of the room. Monsieur de Vergennes arose with a start.

“Let him in,” he said to Luce; “it is Sylvan, my secretary. I recognize his manner of announcing himself when he has anything important to communicate what more can he have to tell us?”

The young man had just entered; he was so pale and agitated that both the Chief and his subordinate uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“What is the matter, Sylvan? has anything more happened?” immediately demanded Monsieur de Vergennes.

“It is a night of crimes, Monsieur,” replied the newcomer; “almost at the same hour and with a dagger almost similar to that with which Froler was stabbed, Monsieur Petit Ledru, the lawyer, and Monsieur Trincart, the great contractor, were both assassinated in their beds,

without the murderers leaving the slightest trace behind them. The Commissioners of Police from the two districts inhabited by the victims have made the necessary verifications and are waiting for Monsieur le Prefet in my office."

This new blow was so unexpected,—for Monsieur Trincart, Monsieur de Marsay's father-in-law, was also Monsieur de Vergenne's grandfather,—that the Chief of Police remained for a moment stunned. But he, having great strength of character, and being capable of rising to any emergency, quickly recovered his presence of mind ; his first thought was of his wife.

" Madame de Vergennes does not know anything yet?" he demanded of the secretary.

" Nothing, Monsieur le Prefet ! The Commissioners of Police have not communicated with anyone but myself. . . . But that is not all . . . I have still to tell you"

And as the young man appeared to hesitate :

" Speak out, Sylvan," said Monsieur de Vergennes, in as calm a tone as if it was a matter of indifference to him, " this succession of crimes, which Fate seems to take pleasure in accumulating this particular night, is well calculated to upset the strongest mind, but hereafter I

shall be the magistrate only, cold, impenetrable and skillful, the detective incarnate in his own person."

"About half an hour ago," continued the secretary on a sign from the Chief to proceed, "your brother-in-law, Monsieur Paul de Marsay, as he was leaving the *Mirlitons*, and had arrived about the middle of the *quay de la Megisserie*, he heard himself called by a young man, fashionably dressed, whose coupé was stationed close to number 18; this latter detail is of importance to remember. Supposing him to be an acquaintance, Monsieur de Marsay ordered his coachman to stop, and descending from the carriage advanced to meet him without any feelings of doubt or suspicion in his mind; at the same moment, four men, whom the coupé had concealed from view, rushed at him, and after having gagged and bound him with the skill of men who knew their business, carried him into the stranger's coupé, and started off at a quick trot; while this scene was being enacted, the latter had kept Monsieur de Marsay's coachman at bay with a loaded revolver in his hand.

"This coachman, who happened to be an ex-police agent whom your brother-in-law had

taken into his service on account of his antecedents, seeing the quay deserted, had been careful not to make the slightest movement; but the coupé which carried his master, had not arrived at the Pont Neuf before he followed in its track, determined to call for help at the first opportunity which offered.

He had not long to wait! Two hundred yards ahead, a small company of police agents were disappearing round the corner of the Louvre. Pascal (that is the coachman's name) made an effort, got before the coupé, which he had never lost sight of, placed himself in front so as to prevent it from passing, and called to the little band for help, following up his cry by a certain whistle well known to police agents.

“The police agents ran forward; the mysterious coupé stopped at the first summons, but a voice from inside, in a brief, imperious tone of voice, demanded an explanation of this unheard-of proceeding. . . . In a few rapid words, Pascal stated his case, but had scarcely finished his speech when a gentleman stepped out of the coupé and addressing the sergeant of police agents:

“‘Monsieur,’ said he to him, ‘I am Don Fer-

dinand d'Alpugar, Portuguese Ambassador. I could soon prove to you my diplomatic immunity from any interference on the part of the police, but I have heard what this good fellow, who, doubtless, has been partaking rather too freely, has said, and you are at liberty to convince yourself that no one is concealed in my coupé.'

"A clear silvery laugh sounded from the carriage as if in confirmation of the words of the ambassador, and the latter, having taken one of the lanterns down from the front of the coupé, so as to light up for an instant the interior of the carriage, where a young lady alone was to be seen, as if lost in a cloud of lace sprinkled with diamonds, resplendent in youth and beauty.

"She saluted the sergeant graciously with her fan, who bowed profoundly, the ambassador took a seat beside her, and the coupé lost no time in disappearing, carried along at a quick trot by the impatient thoroughbred.

"The most curious part of the affair is, Monsieur le Prefet, that Pascal persists in declaring that it was in that identical carriage that his master disappeared, and that he could not have been mistaken in the vehicle, as the

quay was absolutely deserted at that moment; the sergeant of police and his men, who had been stationed at the gate of the Louvre opening on the quay, entirely corroborated Pascal's words, by insisting that no other private carriage had passed them during the time they were there. This is what has been declared to me, Monsieur le Prefet, and I have repeated every detail faithfully on account of the singularity of the event."

"Mystery! always mystery!" murmured Monsieur de Vergennes. . . . "Still two more assassinations whose authors have managed to get out of our way. . . . As to my brother-in-law! . . ."

"And do not let us overlook the strange coincidence," interrupted Luce, "that both victims have been struck like Froler with a poignard. . . ."

"By the same poignard" . . . said Sylvan.

"What do you mean?" demanded the Chief.
"I do not understand."

"I mean, Monsieur, that both the lawyer and Monsieur Trincart have been killed by a dagger exactly similar in appearance to the one by which Froler was struck."

"That complicates matters," said Luce thoughtfully.

"Where are the daggers?" demanded Monsieur de Vergennes.

"I placed them on your private desk, along with the other by which Froler was killed, in order to compare them."

"Follow me, gentlemen," said the Chief, briefly.

And lifting a curtain he led the way through a narrow passage which communicated with his official apartments.

A very slight examination proved the correctness of the young secretary's assertions: the three weapons had blades, large at the base, very long and slender, flame shaped, and solidly mounted with black buffalo-horn handles, in the centre of which was a slight groove running to the point, similar to that found in Malay daggers, and which is made to receive poison.

This singularity immediately attracted Luce's attention: he had lived in Guiana, and perceiving a spot which had not been stained with blood, a sort of gummy substance, he took off a morsel with the point of his penknife and put it to his lips. . . . the others present, among

whom were the two Commissioners of Police, watched him intently, with a curious interest and not daring to interrupt him.

After tasting it, he spat out the substance and quickly rinsing his mouth with a little water taken from Monsieur de Vergennes' carafe, he said in a low voice :

“ Gentlemen, that is *curare*, one of the most deadly of known poisons, inasmuch as there is no antidote; it is taken from the *cobra de capello* and the *trigonocephales*, the most dangerous serpents in the tropics the poison can be swallowed without risk; the stomach eliminates it like any nutritious substance, by digestion; but woe to the one who receives it through the bite of the serpent, or through a wound; the poison passes into the blood and death is instantaneous. The poison in this instance has been mixed with a little vegetable gum, which renders death a little less rapid, although not less certain, for the gum must first be melted in the wound before the *curare* can be absorbed by the blood. Froler was thus able to live nearly half an hour after receiving his death blow.”

It can easily be imagined that all these tragic incidents had thrown the little band presided

over by the Chief of Police into a state of considerable perplexity. Each one asked himself what were the mysterious links existing between the three murders, committed at the same hour and with weapons so similar in appearance that it was impossible to distinguish between them. But their astonishment changed to actual stupefaction by the absolute proof that they were going to acquire of the true connection between the three crimes.

Luce, who had continued his examination, suddenly gave an exclamation of surprise, that for the moment made the onlookers fear that he had wounded himself with one of the weapons he was handling.

“In the name of Heaven, what has happened!” exclaimed Monsieur de Vergennes, who had been absorbed in deep thought.

“Read!” replied the detective simply, holding out the three daggers for inspection, with the three blades placed horizontally one above the other.

The Chief of Police shuddered from head to foot. He had just read one word, terrible in its sinister laconism, engrossed across each blade:

VENDETTA!

Vendetta! that is to say *vengeance!* There was no longer any room for further doubt! One hand had armed the three assassins in one common end of vengeance, but whose was this hand? and what mortal injury had it to avenge? There began the mystery that all the subtleties of reasoning had not been able to elucidate. . . . When the facts carry with them their explanation, it is necessary to act and lose no time in examining them under every form. . . . This was certainly Luce's opinion, and for some moments he had shown evident signs of impatience, which Monsieur de Vergennes' presence alone served to moderate. . . . What remained for him to do on this unlucky night amply justified his desire to withdraw. He was walking backwards and forwards in a feverish state of impatience, when the Chief, who was explaining to the two commissioners the circumstances in connection with Froler's death, noticed his agitation and understood the cause. He himself was in haste to obtain the private statement preferred against his brother-in-law, so he hastened to bring his recital to a close and present Luce as the new Chief of the Detective Force. After the usual compliments

had been addressed to Luce by the two Commissioners of Police, the Chief added :

“ And now, my dear fellow-worker, you have only to go into the field ; three assassins to discover and my brother-in-law to find ; you have your hands full As for you, gentlemen,” he continued, addressing the Commissioners of Police, “ I must keep you here permanently, for grave events may come to pass during this night, and I shall have need of your assistance.”

Luce had taken a rapid leave of Monsieur de Vergennes, and had already moved away, when he stopped and seemed to consider :

“ You wish to ask me something ? ” said the Chief, who noticed his hesitation.

“ I fear you will consider me very bold,” said the detective.

“ Explain, and we shall see,” said Monsieur de Vergennes—then in a lower tone, so as not to be heard by any one but Luce—“ You know there is nothing I would refuse you ! ”

“ If it should occur to you,” hazarded the detective, “ to give me an assistant, I would beg you to consider whether it would not be useful in the interest of the service to choose one without delay ? I have so many inquiries and

researches to make in the case, that it is absolutely necessary I should have a reliable man whom I can send on any track I may deem advisable, while I am superintending matters in some other quarter, and he will meet with more ready obedience from the men if he were invested with the rank of sergeant."

"You are a hundred times in the right. I never thought of it who would you name as best suited for this post, for you must have as your assistant one who understands you and in whom you have confidence."

"What! you will really allow me."

"I insist on your naming your man."

"Well, then, Monsieur le Prefet. I believe no one has a better right, or will better fulfill these duties than Heurtloup; no police agent knows Paris, its gambling houses, drinking places and the ringleaders and participators in crime and vice, as well as he does. I do not say he would be of any value in following on the traces of any one in the higher social spheres, but when a crime has been committed there, the head which conceived the attempt generally belongs to the higher classes, and it is amongst the lowest dregs of society that we must look for the hand

which executed, and in this latter case, the man I propose to you is without his equal in the force."

"Then he is the one I appoint," replied Monsieur de Vergennes, holding out a slip of paper to Luce containing the promotion of his old comrade. "Carry it to the official gazette along with your own."

Luce bowed and was advancing towards the door, when the chief recalled him for the last time :

"And the interdiction to leave the Prefecture? I shall raise it for everyone now, shall I not?"

"I beg you not to do anything yet, Monsieur le Prefet, at least before my return, which will be before daylight."

"Can I not make an exception in favor of my father-in-law?"

"I would not attempt to advise, Monsieur le Prefet, but if one person passes, it is the same as if the order applied to everyone . . . before morning all Paris will know that Froler has been assassinated in his office and that we have allowed the murderer to escape. . . ."

"That is enough; no one shall leave before I

see you again . . . do you require a pass for you and your men?"

"It is unnecessary, Monsieur le Prefet. I possess, as you know, a key of the secret passage which enables me to go out and in at all hours without being obliged to pass the sentinels."

"In that case, adieu! and good luck."

This time Luce did get out of the Chief's office without being recalled. As he passed through the hall, where the men were lounging about, he signed to Heurtloup and three of the keenest of the detectives to follow him, after having, however, presented the former to all the men as their new Sergeant. Heurtloup could not realize his sudden elevation to a post he had never dared to hope for even in his most ambitious dreams; so he was profuse in his thanks to Luce, who, with the familiarity common to policemen, replied, as he bestowed a friendly slap on the shoulder :

"Enough of that, old boy! this is not the moment for palaver. We must show what we can do, and quickly too. It is three o'clock in the morning, and before seven o'clock we must discover not only Froler's murderer, but also those who dealt the blow to Messrs. Petit

Ledru and Trincart; as to the Chief's brother-in-law, Monsieur Paul de Marsay, my opinion is that we will find him without the trouble of looking. Nothing will get it out of my mind that all this has been conceived by the one head and executed by the same hands."

"By my faith, Chief, I have seen still more extraordinary things happen, so that nothing can astonish me. For instance, this very evening, in Monsieur de Vergennes drawing-room, when his young daughter found that diamond. . . ."

Heurtloup never finished his sentence, a violent nudge from Luce's elbow arrested the words on his lips but so that the three men who followed them might suspect nothing, the Chief Detective called out:

"Here we are passing the time in gossiping and allowing the precious moments to slip by. . . ."

Then turning towards the three detectives:

"Lupin!" said he to one of them, "advance."

"Here I am, Chief," replied the agent.

"You must send these two men," continued Luce, "to reconnoitre, one in the street inhabited by Monsieur Ledru, and the other in the one where Monsieur Trincart lived, under any dis-

guise they choose, to gather all the information, gossip and reports which the assassination of these two men must excite when people begin to wake up in that quarter; they must begin with the public-houses, which will open in about an hour, and be careful to notice those coming and going, for if they are clever enough, they may get the chance of making a good catch. It is rarely that assassins do not come back to wander about, some hours after the crime, around the dwelling of their victim, to gather up the opinions and remarks of the crowd, and to learn in what direction suspicions lie. . . . As for yourself, after having found out whether, by chance, Monsieur Paul de Marsay may not have returned home, you will rejoin these two men, going from one to the other, keeping a watch on any person they may point out to you, and be ready to come to their aid in case an arrest should be necessary. . . . You quite understand?"

"Yes, Chief."

"Very well, then; here are twenty francs for you and the men to buy some refreshments, and when you think it desirable, to offer a treat now and then, and now, forward! You will give me

an account of all that has passed at half-past seven o'clock at my office at the Prefecture."

The three men started off at a quick pace and soon the noise of their retreating footsteps were lost in the distance.

"Come now, are you mad?" then said Luce, turning to Heurtloup, who had remained standing speechless in the same place. "Why should you try and convey to these men, who have nothing to do with it, your impressions about the incident of the diamond? Remember that in police affairs, *tout se qui ne sert à rien est nuisible.*/*

"Excuse me, Chief, but you see, this appointment, which I so little expected, has completely upset my ideas . . . it is over now, no one will catch me allowing my tongue to run too freely again."

"That is right. I recognize my old comrade once more! Well, now, what did you wish to say? You can speak out, we are alone now, we are on our way to the house of poor Froler, twenty-five minutes' good walk. Your reflections will help me to pass the time."

And as he walked on Luce thought to him-

* "All unnecessary words are useless."

self : "Is it possible that this old bloodhound of a Heurtloup comprehended the mute scene which was enacted at the Prefect's between Monsieur de Marsay and myself ? In that case, what would become of my last doubts ? For I cannot yet, in spite of what I have seen, persuade myself that my old comrade of the *Moulin d'Usor* can have deliberately mixed himself up in the plot which cost me the loss of my brother."

Meanwhile, Heurtloup was not a little embarrassed how to answer his old companion categorically ; his detective's instinct had warned him intuitively that there was something of importance taking place independent of the official scene. He was the only one who had seen that the diamond had dropped from Luce's pocket-book at the moment when the Chief's young daughter had rushed forward to pick up the jewel. But he could go no further ; the rest of what he had to say was composed of reflections which had arisen in his own mind in connection with these events. It was thus that the old detective terminated his answer to his new chief.

" Well, now for *the reflections !*" insisted the latter.

"It would be more correct to say the ramblings," said Heurtloup. . . . "Do you really wish it, Chief? I will obey orders. Oh! it will not take me long, and more than that, there may not be any common sense in what I have got to say, but it is your own wish. . . ."

"Exactly, and I am ready to listen."

"Very well then, Chief, not only, as I have already said, it seemed to me you were astonished to find your pocket-book empty, which led me to think it must be the diamond you were looking for, but also that there was the famous evidence of which you had just been speaking with an assurance which did not continue as soon as Monsieur de Marsay had been put in possession of his brilliant."

"Continue what did you think then?"

"Knowing what a complete mastery you exercised over yourself, and how little given you are to yielding to excitement without grave reasons, I thought that this diamond might have been a most important piece of evidence which escaped you, and with it, perhaps, the proof that you intended establishing on the strength of the jewel, on account of the place where you found it."

“What do you mean by that?”

“*Dame*, Chief! . . . All the doors of the Prefecture were closed by order before the assassin could have had the time to descend even from one landing; in spite of that, he tries to leave by two different places of exit, and is obliged each time to take refuge in the interior of the building. . . . We search the Prefecture from top to bottom without discovering a soul; then, suddenly introduced into Monsieur le Prefet’s apartments, we find Monsieur de Marsay, his father-in-law, tranquilly installed in the drawing-room, chatting with the ladies, who had but just returned from the opera; then it happens that the diamond, which I thought had escaped from your hands, belongs to this visitor. . . . Then, why should I conceal it from you, I found all that very dubious, and as I followed the different shades of tone in the conversation, I said to myself: ‘After all, it may only be a coincidence! Even supposing the Chief did discover this diamond in the detective’s office near the murdered body of the unfortunate Froler, is that enough to give rise to the gravest presumption of . . . complicity against Monsieur de Marsay.’”

These words, which were only as it were an

account of impressions experienced by himself, added to the already high opinion Luce had formed of the clear-sightedness of his old companion, and he congratulated himself all the more on having secured him as his immediate subordinate.

“ You burn, my friend,” he said to him, “ you burn! . . . it was, in fact, in Monsieur de Froler’s office that I found Monsieur de Marsay’s diamond.”

“ Then we have the murderer safe? . . . ”

“ Not yet, for the old magistrate knows I suspect him, and he is too clever not to have destroyed every proof of his culcability, either as a principal or as an accomplice . . . it is this which we must see to this very night, after having arranged the business which is now taking us to poor Froler’s house. Something tells me, Heurtloup, that we are on the way to discover some frightful plot, which will lead us further than we think. What you have already so skillfully discovered is of certain importance, if we are not mistaken. You see, I share your suspicions, and it does not happen every day that a Judge of the Supreme Court assassinates, or causes to be assassinated, a Chief Detective, for

I cannot believe, until I have proof to the contrary, that he dealt the blow himself ; but I foresee something different yet, the very idea of which makes me shudder. . . .”

“ What is it, Chief ? Can you not confide in me !”

“ Can you doubt it, my old comrade ! This secret consumes me, and I wish you to know all, for I have chosen you as my *alter ego*, my right hand, in the terrible events which are about to break out, and to which the three assassinations of this night are but the prelude. Froler has certainly paid for others ; the lawyer and Trin-cart have paid an old debt as the word *Vendetta* engraven on the blades indicates. It is impossible to say how many are to follow yet, and there is no human power can avert it but myself.”

“ You, Chief ?”

“ Yes, I ! but will I have the courage, the strength? . . . have I even the right ? There are times when justice is not on the side one would suppose. . . . You look at me curiously, as if you thought I had gone mad ? But no, my dear Heurtloup, I am in full possession of all my senses, and your astonishment will be heightened when you hear what I am going to tell you. But

I cannot confide this terrible and mysterious secret to you here in the street; one word, one name above all might be overheard, and then I would not be astonished if we were both put out of the way."

"Here we are, at Froler's," continued Luce. "I have the keys, let us go up and as soon as I have executed by mission we can talk together in safety. Our unlucky chief was a widower and lived alone; no one will interfere with us while I tell you all I wish you to know."

Here Luce rang at No. 20 of the *Rue des Moulins*, gave his name to the concierge, who was in the habit of seeing him come to see Froler at all hours of the night, and a few moments later the two men entered the rooms that had been occupied by the late Chief of the Detective Force.

"Brrr!" . . . said Heurtloup when his companion had lighted a lamp, "it gives me an uncomfortable feeling coming into this room that poor Froler is never to see again."

"He will return once more before leaving for his last resting-place," replied Luce in a tone of sadness. . . . Then, selecting a small key he easily recognized out of the bunch he held in his hand, he went straight to the desk where his

predecessor had been in the habit of keeping his private papers, and opened it. He had not long to look before finding what he desired: A large envelope, on which was written the following words :

“ *Affair of Paul de Marsay.*”

On the right hand corner of the envelope the word “ Confidential ” immediately attracted his attention. It was what he had come to look for! Without touching any of the other papers, which he religiously respected, Luce took the bundle and putting it into the satchel, which he carried attached to a strap, seated himself near his companion, who had been watching this scene with curious eyes, but without attempting to ask the least explanation.

“ Now, my dear Heurtloup,” said Luce without further preamble, and in a concentrated voice that was new to the old detective, “ I am going to make you acquainted with events which I very much fear have led to, not to say caused, the terrible drama, the first scenes of which have been played under our eyes.

“ And at first, how did I come to know Monsieur de Marsay, Monsieur de Vergennes’ father-in-law? It is thirty years now, since Monsieur

de Marsay, thanks to the Duc de Gerçy's influence, from a simple judge at Marseilles, was named *Juge d'Instruction* at Paris. On coming to take possession of his new post, he found in his coupé some fragments of a letter which led him to believe that a crime had been committed at the *Moulin d' Usor* above Saint Rambert, and that the dead bodies had been thrown in the lake which gives its name to the mill. Urged by love of his profession, he hastened to Paris, and asked the Chief of Police, an old college companion, for a detective skillful enough to aid him in his investigations. I was chosen for this official service and left with Monsieur de Marsay for Dauphiny.

“ What can I say to you, my dear friend ; we had thrown ourselves in the midst of a family drama with which we had nothing to do, and in which Monsieur Tournier's honor, who was then First President of the Supreme Court, but since dead, was at stake. We were outrageously outwitted in our own field by two seeming peasants, who played their part to perfection, and who were assisted by Froler, the same whose life has ended so miserably to-night, whom the President had sent to completely

throw us off the right scent, and, if necessary, make away with us altogether if we succeeded in discovering what Monsieur Tournier was so anxious to conceal from the eyes of the world. To be brief, after taking a narcotic which they induced us to drink, we were thrown in a dungeon in the Chateau d' Usor, and it would have been all over with us if I had not had the foresight some days before to address myself to the famous Jacques Laurent."

"The old Chief Detective, under whom we began our career?"

"The same! It will be a long time before the Secret Police will see his equal; he was, you may remember, the presiding genius of the police force. He arrived at the *Moulin d' Usor* disguised as a peddler, and it was mere child's play for him to fool the peasants as well as Froler, and having discovered our retreat, he wrote to the Duc de Gerçy, who arranged the affair with Monsieur Tournier, and one fine day we were set at liberty, ashamed of our foolish enterprise, and, above all, of having been so completely outwitted.

"In spite of that, we had worked and suffered

together, and had sworn eternal friendship for each other."

"This, then, was what you alluded to this evening before Monsieur de Vergennes and Monsieur de Marsay?"

"Precisely. I wished to refresh the latter's memory, to ascertain whether he had forgotten me during the long years which had elapsed, or whether it was with a deliberate purpose that he refused to recognize me. I was soon able to acquire the certainty that this last opinion was the one I must adopt. You will see very soon why Monsieur de Marsay, Judge of the Supreme Court, did not wish nay, could not recognize me.

"Some time after our return from Dauphiny Monsieur de Marsay received notice of his appointment to the judgeship of Clermont-Ferrand. It was tantamount to a disgrace, but simply as a mere form, for six months after, as I explained to Monsieur de Vergennes, his position as *Juge d'Instruction* at Paris was given back to him, whereas I was forgotten and left at Cayenne for fifteen years to fill the post of Central Commissioner that had been given to me."

"And you have never discovered the true

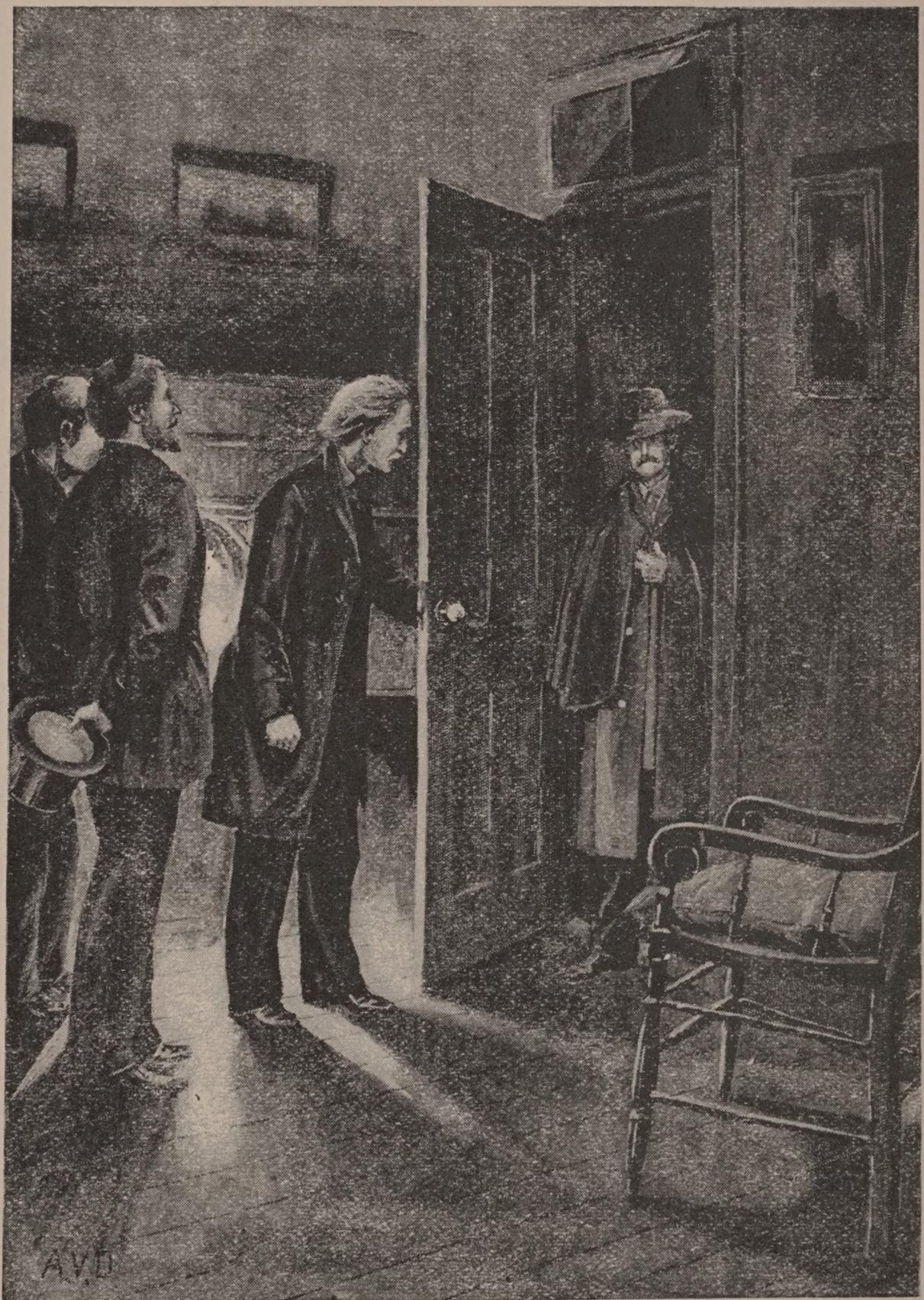
secret of the business that hurried you away into Dauphiny?" demanded Heurtloup, whose curiosity had been awakened by Luce's recital.

"Never!" replied the latter. "Jacques Laurent knew everything; nothing could be kept from that devil of a fellow; but he must have been bound to silence by an oath, for he has always been impenetrable on this subject. . . . I am now coming to the painful part of my story, and you will see how small causes often engender terrible results.

"During the few months which preceded my departure for Cayenne, few days passed that Monsieur de Marsay did not come to see me and give me the assurance that he would not forget me in my exile, and that he would never rest until he had me recalled, which his family influence could easily enable him to do.

"One morning, the beginning of a fatally unlucky day which I would like to blot out of my life, this magistrate met my young brother, who had just terminated his studies, on one of his periodical visits. They naturally began to talk of his future, and Monsieur de Marsay proposed to me to get him placed in his father-in-law, the wealthy banker, Trincart's office. With

steady work and honorable conduct, a brilliant career would lie before him in this house, my friend said; the present time was the era of financiers, and he regretted for his part, that he had not chosen this career, where his great fortune would have enabled him to secure a position of importance and opulence at once. . . . I cannot explain why this idea did not seem to strike my fancy, and I was on the point of refusing the offer, however advantageous it might appear at first sight. Ah! why did I not listen to this secret presentiment! what ruin, what misfortune and sufferings we might have been saved! Look here, Heurtloup; there are in the human organism special cords which vibrate at coming in contact with purely moral impressions, and warn you, either for good or evil, each time when you are about to take an important step in your life . . . and you always do wrong by refusing to listen to this inward monitor, whether expressing its meaning by intuition or presentiment, for it nearly always would aid us in avoiding serious grief. . . . How shall I be able to tell you all! My young brother, Charles Lefevre (for Luce is a name that I assumed when entering the Detective Force), was admitted into Trin-



THE DOOR OPENED AND A TALL FIGURE ENTERED.—*See Part III.*

cart's office with a salary which we had never dared to hope for, and when I left for Cayenne I felt no anxiety on his account, for his principals had assured me that in a very short time he would be promoted to one of the highest positions in the house. Everything, indeed, seemed to meet with our wishes, for eight months afterwards I received the double news that Charles had been made manager in the house of Trincart & Co., and that he was to be married to the sister of the head cashier, Ernest Dutheil.

“ You can judge of my delight, for I loved the boy, who was twelve years younger than myself, and whom I had brought up from his infancy. My father had lost all his fortune when Charles was still very young. I was then at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*, where the year before I had gained the second prize at Rome and was sure of obtaining the first prize that year, but had to give up my pencils and brushes in order to earn my living and support our family, and it was in this way that in despair I accepted a position in the Secret Police, and was able to allow George to go through his college course—that door so necessary to pass for every function and every employment in France.

“I asked for leave to be present at my brother’s marriage and was refused. Monsieur Tournier was still alive, and his hatred towards me was all the more obstinate because he could do nothing against Monsieur de Marsay ; that is how the weak must always suffer for the strong. This was like a real fatality, for I think I might have divined the state of affairs, and that there would have been time even yet to avert the terrible events which were to be accomplished in two years. Trincart had speculated, with his friend the Duc de Gerçy, President of the Corps Legislatif, on the improvements of Paris, and they both passed for having amassed a fortune amounting at the very least to forty millions of francs. The Duc de Gerçy, who was in all the secrets of the ministry, warned his partner of the changes decided on by the Board of Public Works, and when an order was issued condemning any property for public improvements, it regularly happened that a month or so before Trincart had bought up the greater part of the property that was to be destroyed. The bank was a mere blind to conceal these speculations. Yes, I would have seen through it all if I had gone to Paris . . . but, alas ! it is with fate as

with the waves of the sea, you cannot turn aside their course.

“ What remains for me to tell you, my old friend, surpasses all that villainy of man could devise.

“ I felt almost happy at Cayenne thinking over the good fortune of my brother and waiting patiently for the hour of my recall. One thing, however, disturbed me. Since my departure from France I had only heard once from Monsieur de Marsay. Had he forgotten me completely in the midst of the whirl and excitement of Parisien life? or had his appointment as Judge of the Supreme Court placed him at such a distance above the detective that he wished to break off our acquaintance in advance, so that it might not be renewed on my return to Paris? . . . I was altogether at a loss what to think, and wounded in my self-love, I imitated the reserve which had been manifested toward me.

“ One day a convoy of prisoners was announced. The Colonel in charge was to deliver them into my hands, and previous to their embarkment, according to custom, a list of these unfortunates was brought to me by one of the keepers, who handed it to me and withdrew.

Scarcely had he gone out when I glanced over it to see the number of convicts they were bringing us . . . but two names seemed to stand out in relief under my gaze, as if written in letters of fire. The paper fell from my hands and I fainted. But this weakness only lasted a very short time, one would have said that in my swoon I had preserved the consciousness and energy that I needed to display in this awful situation. . . . I lost no time in again opening my eyes, and pulling myself together with an effort, picked up the paper and again examined it with the vague hope that I had been mistaken. . . . Alas! it was not so. . . . the list was headed by these two names:

“Charles Lefevre, manager for Trincart & Co.”

“Ernest Dutheil, head cashier of Trincart & Co.”

“The ‘Column of punishment’ bore with regard to each one of them: twenty years’ hard labor, ten years’ suspension, five years’ surveillance.

“That of ‘Crime committed,’ bore: Forgery. Theft!

“Judge of my despair, Heurtloup, on read-

ing these lines, which left me no doubt regarding the identity of the condemned men. I did not hesitate one single instant in deciding that Charles, whose honesty and principle I could depend upon, had been led away by his brother-in-law . . . and my thoughts immediately reverted to our aged parents, who could not be expected to survive such a shock. . . .

“In any case, what was to be done? what line of conduct ought I to pursue with regard to them? Ought I to receive them as common malefactors whom I know nothing about? . . .

“I was making a violent effort to collect my ideas, when I noticed a common sailor rowing backwards and forwards before my dwelling, keeping close to the shore and throwing furtive glances into my garden without daring to land and enter. I saw that he wished to speak to me, perhaps even he had been sent secretly by the prisoners. I came forward quickly, signing to him to approach, which he did without delay. I conducted him to my office, where we were in no danger of being disturbed by any one. Once there, he drew off his woolen cap, and taking out of it a voluminous missive, handed it to me.

“My heart was beating violently; there was

reading in it for several hours. . . . 'No doubt,' I said, 'a few lines will be sufficient reply to this, but I cannot give you an answer immediately.'

"'That does not signify, Monsieur,' said the good fellow; 'I have obtained permission to spend the day with my brother, who has purchased a farm near here, and I will come again before returning to the ship.'

"Most fortunately, the difficulties attending their lodging obliged me to defer the reception of the convicts until the following day, and I was able to read the letters sent me by my father, mother, the unfortunate Charles, his advocate, and some friends of the family.

"It was one unanimous cry of innocence in favor of the two unfortunate men. It had been impossible to find an advocate in the courts of Paris who would consent to act for the prosecution in this affair. After having examined the charge,—a monument of falsehood combined specially to ensure the condemnation of the accused,—the *procureur general*, a friend of the Duc de Gerçy, had been obliged to insist on some one fulfilling the office. Trincart had to be saved from an accusation of fraudulent bankruptcy, and also the President of the Corps Leg-

islatif, who would find his credit and honor considerably tarnished by the fall of his friend.

“ For five or six years they had been heavy losers on the Bourse, where they had been speculating heavily, having sometimes a difference of eight or ten millions to pay, when all at once they saw the abyss opening under their feet. Instead of stopping, they endeavored to repair their losses by still wider speculation, but fate was against them, and very soon they were reduced to making use of the money deposited in the bank. To save themselves, they were obliged to simulate a theft of five or six millions gradually effected during a period of eight or ten years by their employees; they had either to adopt this course or to allow Trincart to appear before the Court of Assizes, which would cause ruin and dishonor to an entire group of closely allied, powerful families, including the President of the Corps Legislatif.

“ They decided on adopting the first course, and the duties of Charles and the unfortunate Dutheil immediately marked them out to these wretches as being the two on whom the accusation would first fall. They had their books secretly recopied by the hirelings of the Duke,

showing that they ought to have in the bank a balance of fourteen million seven hundred and ninety-two thousand six hundred and seventy-five francs and thirty centimes, while in reality only about four millions were to be found.

“ Ten millions deficit was not possible, even in ten years, on the part of model employees to whom no vice could be attributed, so they accused them of speculating on the Bourse with the stolen money.

“ As Charles, in his position of manager of Trincart & Co., attended to all the business of the house, and Dutheil was commissioned to act for the Duke, it was sufficient to establish their guilt when there was no appearance on the *copied* books of any of the heavy operations carried on by Charles for the house, and by Dutheil on the Duke’s account as a client of the bank, and so the farce was played! . . . the absence of any mention in the books indicated that the operations carried on by the two young men had been on their own personal account . . . and they were irretrievably lost! . . .

“ Yet, as I have said only a moment before, everything did not go smoothly for the plotters. The Bank of France expert chosen to examine

the books, after having proved the irregularities, declared that the ink and calligraphy inspired him with the strongest suspicion of foul play; the books appeared to him to have been recently tampered with, and in spite of the enemies he had to dread, this honest fellow persisted in his assertion.

“Besides, the accusation did not hold water; a hundred times Charles had been seen with his employer on the Bourse, making under his eyes and with his approbation, the largest operations. But a condemnation was necessary; and they obtained it by having the accused remanded to another session, where they secured a verdict of guilty from the hands of a picked jury.

“When the sentence was read which condemned the unfortunate young men to twenty years imprisonment at hard labor, there was great excitement through the court-room, both judge and jury were hooted, and the great banker R. . . . who had been present at the trial, wrote a letter the following day to the condemned men, which he caused to be printed in all the Paris papers and throughout the whole of France. It was as follows: ‘Gentlemen: I have followed your trial with the attention it merited.

Remember, whenever the moment arrives that you are able to escape from Cayenne, in which you will have the assistance of all honorable minded men, that I have two positions as head cashier to offer you—without security—in our London and Vienna houses. Meanwhile, I beg to inform you that I will honor any draft, whatever the amount may be, that you may wish to draw on account of salary, for I consider you, from to-day, as forming a part of our *personnel*, and in the enjoyment of unlimited leave with complete pay.'

"You can judge of the effect produced by such a letter, emanating from one of the greatest bankers of the day.

"Now, can you guess who the judge was who presided at this sad affair?"

"I confess that. . . ."

"It was Monsieur de Marsay."

"Impossible?"

"Yes. I said as you did, it is impossible; and yet it was the case; and what is more, when the second jury, shaken by the inconsistencies of the accusation and the numerous proofs in favor of the accused, seemed undecided as to what course they ought to adopt, Judge de Marsay,

with an infernal skill, which the counsel for the defence could not answer, went over one by one all the arguments of the accusation, and commanded the jury to bring in a verdict of guilty on the twofold charges of forgery and theft!"

"And now, can you guess who was the foreman of the jury in this terrible business? It was Monsieur Petit Ledru, notary of the Duc De Gerçy."

"The same who was assassinated this night?"

"Yes, he who has paid his debt this very night."

"What do you mean by 'paid his debt?'"

"What! Do you not understand?"

"No, I confess I don't."

"Well, observe these singular coincidences and explain them if you can. Froler, whom I have not spoken of yet, arrested Charles and Ernest Dutheil, on the complaint of Trincart, although he knew them to be innocent and could have given them a chance of escape, and he is assassinated this very night with a dagger bearing the word *Vendetta* engraved on the blade; that is one. . . . Trincart is the principal author of this conspiracy and perishes this night

in the same manner, and with a dagger bearing the word *Vendetta*; here we have two!

“The notary, Petit Ledru, takes the lead in the jury, who were wavering in favor of the condemned. On leaving the court the same fate awaits him; the same dagger and the same word *Vendetta*; there we have three.

“Judge de Marsay presides at both trials with revolting partiality, although no one is more convinced of the innocence of the two young men, and if for the moment he escapes the dagger, it is perhaps because they only left him the alternative of stabbing Froler, or being the fourth victim; they abduct his son under such conditions that it is possible he may never see him again. And as I have told you, I very much fear that the jury and all the persons who have been mixed up in this unhappy business will meet with their fate one after the other.

“But whose is the hand that strikes? Whose is the head which points out the victims? We are bound in honor to discover this, and I am in terror that we shall find ourselves one fine day face to face with my brother and Ernest Dutheil . . . and then, what shall we do, tell me, my old friend? We, the representatives of

social, halting justice, always ready to bow before power, subject to error when we are in presence of an individual justice, the representatives of which demand in their turn an account from the villains who struck them in their honor, family, and interests? For I have forgotten to tell you the terrible consequences of the sentence of the Court of Assizes. My father and mother died of grief" here Luce's voice faltered, and a deep drawn breath showed Heurtloup to what degree the rough detective was suffering in recalling these painful reminiscences. . . . After a slight pause, Luce continued:

“ Poor Charlie! we were all so fond of him! However painful this return to past events may be, you must know all, my old friend, so that you may be in a position to support me, to advise, for I, too, at times, can think of nothing but vengeance, vendetta! vendetta! . . . This word is written in letters of flaming fire in my brain, and twenty times I have been on the point of throwing up my position and devote my time to avenging my people. Do you know that since her husband's departure for Cayenne, Fanny, my poor brother's wife, has never been

seen. What can have become of her, with her little daughter, then only seven years old. . . . She was without any resources, for justice had wrested from her all her little fortune, in order to pay the expenses of her husband's trial. . . . She was too high principled to fall, too proud to beg. . . . My God! my God! what can have become of her? . . . Perhaps she sought for forgetfulness and repose in death!"

"All that you tell me, Chief, is very terrible," said the worthy Heurtloup, who up to this moment had been unable to articulate a word from emotion "but you did not tell me what became of your brother and Dutheil?"

"Why do you not address me in the old familiar way? . . . my new position has in no way changed my feelings. I do not know, myself. After I had read the letters brought me by the sailor, and was persuaded of the innocence of both the unfortunate fellows, I concluded that in order to be of use to them, it was better that no one should suspect the ties that bound us together. . . . I wrote a long letter with a double meaning, but which I knew Charles would understand, and gave it the same evening to the sailor, who took charge of it, and the next day I

feigned illness in order to avoid receiving the convoy of prisoners; the meeting in public would have been more than I could bear.

“It is useless to relate to you our life at Cayenne. The hours are passing and we must determine on a line of action before daybreak. Monsieur de Vergennes expects us and we must keep our appointment with him. . . . I am coming now to the only interesting point for you: the escape of Charles and his brother-in-law from Cayenne.”

“Then they did escape?”

“In less than a year after their arrival, thanks to the banker, their friend, who had sworn to himself to effect their deliverance from the infernal life of the convict prison. He had contrived to open friendly communication with some of the attendants commissioned to superintend the convicts. . . . Ah! gold is a great power.

“The banker, R. . . . had written to his correspondents at Cayenne, who bought ingots of gold and silver from the mines, not to neglect any means to assist the two prisoners in escaping from their painful position; he gave them *carte blanche* as to money and the sum to be expended.

“Charles and his companion very soon experi-

enced the effect of their friend's recommendation they received through the keepers themselves all that they could desire, and every one, including even the director of the prison, did what they could to soften the misery of their position. . . . Six months had not passed when they made them leave off the chain and placed them to work on a plantation. From that moment their escape was only a question of time.

"One evening they received a message to go down to the coast a little below the Isle du Salut; a steam launch was waiting for them and conveyed them on board a small steamer chartered expressly for them to New York, with orders to land them wherever they desired. In case they did not wish to return to Europe, the captain of the steamer was to give them a draft for a hundred thousand francs, payable at sight, in any part of the globe, at any bankers.

"I learned some time afterwards through the banker's agent at Cayenne, that they had gone in the direction of Australia, and that is the last I heard of them. . . . That is twelve years ago. Some time after, I was recalled to Paris. This long silence had ended by making me believe in their deaths, for Charles was too fond

of me to leave me without news, and he could have written to me in Paris without any danger, when the triple assassination of this night and abduction of Paul de Marsay, in which it is difficult for me not to recognize their hand, proves to me that for the last ten years they have been preparing everything for the supreme hour of their vengeance! and *that* hour has struck!

“ I understand Charles’ silence now, in arrogating to himself this role of dispenser of justice ; he and his brother-in-law entering into a strife with society which will defend itself, he did not wish to drag me along with him in the terrible retribution which awaits them if they are apprehended They have staked their own lives in the game they have engaged in, but Charles did not wish to risk mine.

“ This, my old friend, is the terrible secret which has been consuming me, and which I had to confide in some one ; it seems already as if it weighed less heavily on me now that I have been able to open my heart freely to you. You see in what a terrible position I find myself, for we must always return to this : What are we to do ? How can I reconcile the exigencies of my position with my affections can I, in one

word, remain Chief of the Detective Force now that I know the perpetrators of the three assassinations and whom my duty exacts I should deliver up to justice."

"To which?" replied old Heurtloup. "Have you not fully demonstrated to me only a few moments ago, that there are two sorts: that which serves the Duc de Gerçy, Trincart and other powerful villains who play with the honor and lives of others, if it happens to be necessary to conceal their own crimes; or the other which emanates from the wounded consciences of honest people. If I must confess the truth, I shall employ the strength my new position gives me to protect your brother and his companion against their own imprudence, and without it being necessary for you to come forward. I will be there, in order to divert the attentions of our agents from the track where Charles Lefevre and Ernest Dutheil may be found

"What! that is your way of reasoning, and you would do that for me?" said Luce, overcome with grateful emotion by this mark of affection from the old detective.

"And why not, Luce?" replied Heurtloup. "We do not serve each other in mere words; for

me, I only see two innocently condemned men, your father and mother dead of despair, and your sister-in-law and her daughter wandering about without bread or shelter, and then I put to one side the justice which prostitutes itself at the feet of the powerful, the justice of the De Gerçys and the Trincarts, to follow the true justice, the justice which is with your family and the numerous victims these wretches have sacrificed to their ambition and the concealment of their crimes. . . . So, it is agreed, we are going to act as counter police, and turn back our own agents from the right track."

"We shall have a good deal of difficulty in succeeding, for the authorities will be displeased at this series of assassinations committed on the same night, and should a negative result ensue, another will fill Monsieur de Vergennes' place, which will lead to grave complications."

"How is that?"

"That is a secret which has not been confided to me, but from the little I have heard, I understand that the Chief is in a position somewhat similar to ours, for he is working to avoid an inquiry ordered by the Procureur General himself, and the result of which might be to cause

the dishonor of one of the oldest families in the faubourg."

"It would be singular if this business had anything to do with ours!"

"I have had something like a presentiment of it myself. . . . For the last twenty-four hours we have lived in an atmosphere of mystery sufficient to disconcert the most skilled. As for myself, I only wish for two things: to save my brother and Dutheil from the terrible situation they are in, for whatever we may say, we live in a well regulated society, which does not permit of personal vengeance, and if they are taken, they must end on the scaffold and, also, to save Monsieur de Vergennes, who has allowed me to discover that retaining his position as Chief of Police was almost a question of life and death to him. Then these three assassinations are of such importance, on account of the social positions of the victims and the manner in which they have been committed, that if we do not search others will get in advance of us, and if we do not discover the guilty ones, others will; once the affair gets into the hands of the court, and that will be before midday, we will be put aside, and the judge will then engage the men he is

in the habit of employing and in whom he has confidence, and we, consequently, will be left out of the whole affair and unable to afford any assistance to my brother and Dutheil.

“Without taking into consideration,” reflected Heurtloup aloud, “that the identity of the three daggers and this devil of a word, *Vendetta*, repeated on each blade, will prove to the court, as it does to us, that the blow comes from the same hand; and that the three affairs will be put in the hands of the same magistrate, which would be a serious matter—apart from this annoying circumstance, each case might have been given to a different magistrate, which would have so complicated matters that we would not have much difficulty in rendering it absolutely incomprehensible.”

“Pray Heaven that the case does not fall into the hands of Monsieur le Guillemat. That magistrate has a keen scent in such matters, which may overthrow all previous calculations; he has sometimes those intuitions of genius which enables him to succeed where every one else would fail.”

“Before everything else, we ought, I think, to find your brother, and induce him to leave

France with his brother-in-law immediately. Escaped convicts come back here for the purpose of assassinating their accusers, and judges would make their case so clear that all hope of escape would be hopeless. . . . With your mind at rest on that point, we will be more at liberty to exert our brains to avert the suspicions of the magistrate falling on them."

At this stage of the conversation, Luce, who had been mechanically turning over the leaves of the statement which Froler had compiled against Paul de Marsay, could not restrain an exclamation of surprise :

"No more doubt on the subject!" he exclaimed. "It is he!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" demanded Heurtloup.

"Listen," replied Luce.

And he read :

"Copy of the note addressed by me to Monsieur de Marsay's father :

"You comprehend all the gravity of the affair. Forgery means the Court of Assizes for your son. You see that I am not afraid of speaking plainly. The influence of the Duc de Gerçy can

easily procure the post of State Councillor. This evening, at midnight precisely, for the last time, I shall expect you without fail, in my office at the Prefecture at the time mentioned. Yield ! Yield !

“(Signed) FROLER.”

“ What can be the meaning of all that ? ”

“ Do not interrupt me, listen to the end :
And he continued to read :

“ *Answer of Monsieur de Marsay :* ”

“ MONSIEUR : You are holding the knife at my throat at twelve o’clock to-night, I shall be in your office at the Prefecture de Police ; be good enough to send away your people so that no one may overhear the shameful terms which you constrain me to accept you see that I also do not fear to speak plainly ; but do not think to get the better of me by withholding the proofs. If I am to be forced to extremities, I shall not draw back before any scandal. So yield ! Yield !

“(Signed) DE MARSAY.”

“ Now, do you understand,” said Luce, as he finished reading, “ how these two letters throw

a light on the situation? . . . You need not be a very clever logician to deduct from that what has come to pass. Paul de Marsay, whose expenses are enormous, for the young gentleman spends from a hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand francs a year, and that has not proved enough, finding himself one day in the grasp of a creditor,—you see the threat of a prosecution at the Court of Assizes in Froler's letter—has taken it into his head to commit a little forgery. Complaint has been made to Froler, as people often do who are ignorant of the proper legal steps to take in such cases, and he, glad of the chance, has held back the document under pretext of making the father pay for it; the latter, informed of the transaction, has given to the utmost of his ability to save his son from the consequences of his evil conduct, and thus begins the first act of that fatal drama. Froler, having accepted the money for payment of the forged paper, finds it absolutely necessary either to restore it or pay the money, but he has informed Monsieur de Marsay that he will only give up the forged paper when he is appointed Council-lor of State. Yesterday morning, poor Froler said to me in relation to this, while he rubbed

his hands gleefully: 'This time I have secured it, and whatever influence you have, let it be exerted now in your favor, it is time to look after my succession.' His succession was indeed to be open, but not in the way he expected."

"So it must have happened either that the *Duc de Gerçy*'s patience was exhausted, or that his influence was not powerful enough to raise a detective to the position of Councillor of State, but what is certain is that *Monsieur de Marsay* kept his appointment, but without the appointment of Councillor in his pocket; then what happened? I can imagine the scene as if I had been present. The old judge, who would sacrifice his life for his good-for-nothing son, begged, implored, entreated *Froler*, who remained inflexible; he had got it into his head to wear the robe of office this time, and not for anything in the world would he allow this occasion to escape him.

"At last, tired of begging, at stooping so low, almost on bended knee to a detective, the old man stood erect and adopted a different tone; he, also, had come to *Froler*, with a fixed determination; he threatened in his turn. If it must be so, then his son would be prosecuted, but he

had the detective's letter, and in less than five minutes he would have him arrested for trying to levy blackmail ; his son-in-law, Monsieur de Vergennes, would soon effect that much. On hearing these words, I can fancy Froler replying in a mocking voice :

“ As you choose. Go, my dear sir, I shall not hinder you. ”

“ And that was his sentence of death the old man would look dark, determined and the blow was struck. He became an assassin to save his honor, then secured the forged paper, and made himself a thief for the sake of his son ! ”

“ Do you know, Luce, ” said Heurtloup, who had been listening to every word with amazement, “ you would have made a splendid advocate ! You have described that scene in a way that reminds me of those gentlemen at the theatre. ”

“ Thank you for the compliment, my old friend. You see we have got one of Froler's murderers. With these two letters and an affidavit relative to the diamond, the most stubborn jury could not hesitate to condemn. There is only one thing I cannot understand : it is the exact resemblance between the poignard he

made use of, with those which meted out death to the other victims of this night."

"Chance, perhaps."

"No. Chance never brings about such complete similitudes; the same blade, same handle, same graven word, *Vendetta*, and above all, that groove which I recognized as containing the presence of *curare*, that terrible poison of the tropics. To judge from the weapons and the manner in which the crime was committed, it is easy to divine an association of people who avenge themselves, and the victims have made me think immediately of my brother and Ernest Dutheil. But what I cannot understand is the fact of Monsieur de Marsay forming a part of this association, and the possessor of a dagger which *certainly* was not made in France. Perhaps we shall discover the indirect influence of Charles and his brother-in-law, but for the moment, no amount of reasoning can enable us to arrive at the exact truth."

"At the same time, there is one obscure point which is now quite clear. . . . It is very evident that Monsieur de Marsay is Froler's murderer. If necessary, if we have a serious matter on hand, such as effecting the release of your brother, who

one day may be arrested in spite of my efforts to avert the storm brewing over his head, we may be able to make use of these letters, and say, as Monsieur de Marsay did: ‘Yield! Yield!’”

“No, my good fellow, we must only trust to the watchful superintendence which we are about to organize; you have still illusions at your age? After all, what are detectives only simple instruments they would force us to deposit our documents in the keeping of the Court, that same night they would disappear for ever, and the game would be at an end.”

“You think he would dare to get the start of us in that way!”

“My dear fellow, we would hardly have made him acquainted with the fact that these letters were in our possession, before he would be with the Procureur General, who married his youngest daughter, and then return to Monsieur de Vergennes, husband of the eldest and then everything would come to pass just as I have said.”

“Why did he not adopt that course with Froler?”

“Why, simpleton that you are, the case is very different. In the first place, it concerned

his son, which is a very different matter from a son-in-law, and then neither one nor the other wou'd have dared filch the papers; besides, Froler would have cried out like the very devil if he had been arrested, and nothing would have kept him quiet, not even the value of the forged note. You may hush up an affair between functionaries, but when a tradesman is mixed up with it, it is no longer the same thing. . . . Believe me, Heurtloup, the one thing to do is to watch over my brother and his companion, for it depends on us alone to save them from going one day, sooner or later, to leave their heads on the Place de la Roquette."

"Listen, Luce. I have an idea."

"Well, what is your idea?"

"What are you going to say to the Chief when we return?"

"To Monsieur de Vergennes?"

"Yes, for we are not much more advanced than when we left the Prefecture. . . . what we do know, it is impossible to confide to him."

"You are right. What we do know we must keep to ourselves; but I have sworn to Monsieur de Vergennes that he will not have to leave the

Prefecture de Police, and I must keep my word."

"Is he threatened, then, from other quarters?"

"No, he has enough without that! you know what the Press is, and what power public opinion has in Paris. The Chief was not mistaken! Any one can divine the effect which would be produced by the announcement that three assassinations had been committed this very night, one within the walls of the Prefecture, and the abduction of a magistrate, with the police reduced to confess that they had been unable to lay hands on any of the guilty parties; add to that the sensational notes from the reporters, the leading articles in the more serious papers regarding the efficiency of the detective force in Paris.

"For a long time past we have been trying to enlighten the Government on the evil influence brought to bear on the service of the Prefecture de Police, and the events of the night once more prove us to be right.

"You know what the consequences will be. There will be only one cry through all Paris, and we cannot expect the Chief to bear up against this general clamor! If, at or before eight

o'clock to-morrow morning we cannot send a note to the papers conceived as follows: 'The assassins have been secured,' the Minister of the Interior, in order to protect himself and retain his position, will dismiss Monsieur de Vergennes by saying to him: 'What I am doing now, my dear fellow, may seem senseless, but we must satisfy public opinion;' and the new Chief will make haste in his turn to trample on the Chief Detective, in order to have it said of him: 'At last we have a Chief of Police with some go in him; that's the sort of man we want at the head of the force.' It would do no good, of course, neither would it lead to the discovery of the guilty, but it would keep *Jacques Bonhomme** quiet, who on retiring for the night would say to his wife: 'These policemen, if one did not give them a lesson now and then. . . .'"

"Then Monsieur de Vergennes is lost?"

"Yes, if we cannot save him."

"What do you think of doing?"

"So far, I cannot think of anything. . . . I made an appointment with him for half-past seven o'clock in the morning, so as to give him time for reflection, but I confess that I see no

* The typical Frenchman.

means of getting out of it . . . but can you not suggest an idea? . . .

“ I can, perhaps, suggest where we might find one !”

“ Let us have your idea then.”

“ Suppose we go and consult the man who for twenty-five years has been the veritable leader of the police in France, and from whom plots, crimes, assassinations, nothing has been able to escape, in fact, our old Chief, Jacques Laurent, under whom we first served.”

“ You are right, a thousand times right !” exclaimed Luce ; “ he is the only man who can help us out of this difficulty. How was it I never thought of that before . . . we have lost a great deal of precious time here.”

“ Console yourself ; it was just as well you should have informed me of what you have done, so as not to look too awkward before him, and then, although he may have kept up his habit of early rising since his retirement into private life, we could not very well have presented ourselves at his house in the middle of the night.”

“ What o’clock is it now ?”

“ Four o’clock.”

“ Then we have three hours and a half to

spare; it is time we set about finding some means to ward off the danger threatening us, if such a thing is possible. . . . Come, let us set off for the Rue Lepic."

A few minutes later the two detectives, their elbows held well into their sides, were on their way to the heights of Montmartre.

It was there that the old octogenarian, Jacques Laurent, late chief of the detective force, lived alone with an old housekeeper, he who during two generations and four governments, the Restoration, the Monarchy of July, the Republic, and the Second Empire, had filled all Europe with his exploits.

They related marvellous tales of which he was the hero, and his memoirs, if he had chosen to write them, might have contained the secret history of the first half of this century.

One day the Austrian Ambassador at Paris received information from his government that four conspirators, who were plotting against the life of the French Emperor Francis, had taken refuge in the capital of France. The detective force was instantly warned, and four days afterwards, Jacques Laurent addressed a note couched in the following terms to the Austrian Embassy :

"The four individuals mentioned have never left Vienna: they are hiding, concealed by the concierge, in a cellar of the third house to the left of Joseph Strass, and are to fire on the Emperor as he enters the cathedral to celebrate the anniversary of the Empress Marie-Therese."

The information was found to be strictly correct on all points, and the four conspirators were seized at the very moment they were preparing to throw their infernal machine through the opening of the cellar on the Imperial cortége.

On another occasion, an unfaithful employee of the Bank of England had stolen, it was said, a plate for one hundred pounds sterling, with the different seals of the signatures that are affixed, and managed to keep them from Saturday until Monday morning. But this space of time had sufficed to enable an impression to be taken, so perfect that the forgery was not discovered until several years had elapsed, and then only in consequence of the plate having been destroyed by order of the Directors. Then, at the expiration of a certain time, it was remarked with astonishment that four times the amount of bank-notes of this series had been returned than had been issued; but astonish-

ment was changed into stupor when it was found impossible to distinguish the false notes from the true. They suspected with reason the honesty of one of the higher employees; but after the most minute researches, it was impossible to discover the guilty party. Despairing of the case, and at the failure of the English police, the Bank addressed itself to the Prefecture of Police at Paris, requesting that search might be made in their city, for it was supposed the forgers had taken refuge in France. Jacques Laurent left for London incognito, and consulted with the Board of Directors regarding the measures to be taken. The affair had been kept secret; he advised, on the contrary, to publish the numbers of the forged notes in the home and foreign papers, to noise the matter abroad as much as possible, and then to appear as if they dropped taking any further interest in the matter.

Some days afterwards an old Jew dressed in the Turkish costume had opened a shop in one of the lowest streets of the great city. "Money of every description exchanged. Ingots of gold and silver bought. Antiquities and curiosities of all kinds purchased"—such was his sign.

Five muscular young fellows and a member of

the London Detective Force passed their time smoking and drinking in the back shop, which communicated with a sort of cellar furnished with a solid door.

It was Jacques Laurent who had organized his trap.

The same day, a gentleman came to offer an old silver bowl for sale; the old jew asked him to pass into the back shop to be paid, and on a sign, the five men took hold of him and placed him in the cellar—that made one. While waiting for the real culprit, Jacques Laurent amused himself by clearing London of some of its most dangerous malefactors. At last, before a week had passed, a stranger drove up to the little shop, and descending from his carriage asked for a pair of Turkish slippers, valued at two shillings (about fifty cents).

“Not very clever, my good fellow,” thought Jacques Laurent; “you are going to offer me a bank-note in payment.”

He had scented his prey!

The stranger drew from his pocket-book, which seemed stuffed with notes, a bank-note of one hundred pounds (five hundred dollars) to pay the two shillings. At the look Jacques

Laurent gave him, the forger, for it was he, turned to fly, but the door did not open from inside except to those who were in the secret. He turned back and rushed at his adversary, dagger in hand, but in a very short time he was disarmed and thrown by Jacques Laurent alone, and was soon sent to rejoin the fifteen culprits who had been already caged.

The English Detective was only there to legalize the arrests.

In eight days the Chief Detective of the Prefecture de Police in Paris had caught fifteen of the most dangerous characters in London, who for many years had mocked at the efforts of the English police to capture them, including the famous forger whom, it was discovered, had been a manager in the works where the plates had been made.

The Board of Directors of the Bank of England handed a note of a hundred thousand francs as reward for his services to Jacques Laurent, and the great detective distributed it, without distinction, among the agents in his service, without keeping one farthing for himself.

It was one of his principles that the police ought never to conceal anything, the most ex-

tensive publicity turning always in its favor. Thus, in the affair of the English Bank, publicity had brought about the result of causing every one to refuse bank-notes bearing the incriminating numbers, and naturally the forger had to look out for some seller of bric-a-brac in one of the slums of London, having the appearance of a receiver of stolen goods, to try and pass off his notes on him. But as there were in London thousands of these sort of shops kept by people who were on their guard, Jacques Laurent had disguised himself as an old Oriental jew, dirty and sordid in appearance, persuaded that in his embarrassment of choice, the forger would be more likely to apply to him, for in his twofold character of Israelite and Turk, he ought to be—according to the reputation given to these people—more accessible even than others of his class to shady transactions.

The success of the experiment had proved him to be right.

Tall, solidly built and with the strength of a Hercules, which had often been the means of enabling him to hold his own against overwhelming odds, Jacques Laurent possessed besides a deep insight into the workings of the

human heart, and he always proceeded by the most simple and natural means to make his most important and dangerous captures. . . . "Was that all?" often asked his adversaries. Well, yes, it was only that, but, like the egg of Columbus, it had to be discovered, and above all succeed, for Jacques Laurent never failed.

Such was the old Chief Detective whose advice our two friends were going to ask in the terrible and trying position in which they found themselves placed.

Having arrived at the head of the Rue Lepic, Luce rang at the door of the isolated house inhabited by the old man.

"Who is there?" demanded the old house-keeper, through a small opening.

Luce gave their names and qualifications.

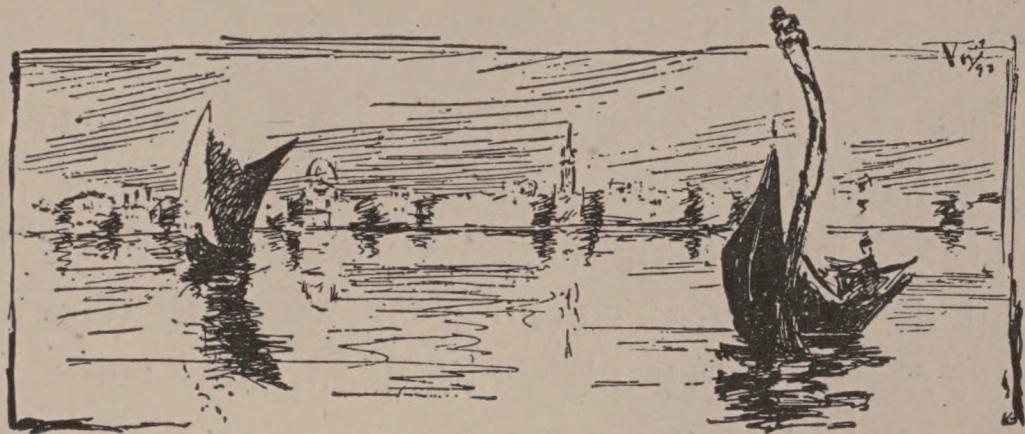
"Eh! come in, come in," said the joyous voice of the old master of the house, who had just got up. . . . "Come in; what good wind has blown you here at this early hour to the hermit of Montmartre?"

"He is in good humor," whispered Luce rapidly to Heurtloup. . . . "We may hope! he will help us out of our difficulty. . . . But, above all things, for I know his whims, look as if you

were paying him an ordinary visit . . . not one word before he questions us!"

"I understand, Chief."

The door was opened wide, and Jacques Laurent, tall, straight and solid as an oak in spite of his ninety years, his features lit up by a kindly smile, held out both hands to welcome them.



PART SECOND.

A SINISTER ASSOCIATION.

Vendetta !

On that particular morning, Don Ferdinand d' Alpujar, the Portuguese Ambassador, was holding a little reception of intimate friends, numbering about ten, of the leading people in Parisian society. There were present the Duc de Dampmart-Conti, renowned for the magnificent stud of horses he kept ; the two brothers Tremneuc, whose ancestor had been at the fight at Trente in the land of Saint-Cas, great hunters, great gamblers, and great wrestlers, as all Bretons of high lineage are ; Hubert de la Villantrois, captain in the navy ; Don Alvarez de Castro, Portuguese noble, fifty times a mil-

lionaire and an intimate friend of the ambassador; his younger brother, Emmanuel de Castro, who was counted the best swordsman in Paris; Paul de Marsay, the fashionable Solicitor-General; André de la Saulze, an indefatigable traveller, who had engraved his arms with the iron point of his staff on the highest glacier of the Himalayas.

It was the first time Paul de Marsay had been present at one of these hebdomadary reunions of the ambassadors, so much sought after in the select circles of Paris. There were never more than twelve invitations given, and no one was admitted who could not trace his descent from the Crusaders. The sons of merchants, of manufacturers and contractors, had tried every means to gain a footing in the house, but the doors had remained hermetically sealed for them, so that an invitation to one of Monsieur d' Alpujar's reunions was equivalent to a patent of old and pure descent.

When Paul de Marsay had received his invitation through Emmanuel de Castro, his intimate friend, it had not been obtained without a good deal of difficulty, for in Portugal, they think as much of the mother's family as the father's, and

Paul's mother, Madame de Marsay, was a Trincart, a name which, apart from its vulgar origin, had been pretty well smirched in the financial world during the sinister histories we are acquainted with; but Emmanuel de Castro, who attached the greatest importance to his friends being invited, laid so much stress on the Salic law and played his cards with so much skill and discretion, that Monsieur d' Alpujar, who did not wish to pass judgment himself, put the question to the vote among some of his intimate friends, and Emmanuel gained the unanimous vote of the ten present, less that of the master of the house, who remained strictly neutral.

These ten persons formed the kernel of the reunions; they were perpetual guests. Only two new guests were invited each week.

Paul de Marsay had naturally been in ignorance of the species of ballot his name had been submitted to, and had been greatly elated on receiving the invitation of the noble ambassador. It was a consecration of nobility that he less than any others could afford to hold in disdain, for in spite of all the fictions of the Salic law, the Faubourg Saint Germain had never pardoned his father for having introduced into the old family

of De Marsay one of the name of Trincart, so he had firmly resolved that when he married, he would purify his escutcheon by a fresh graft, taken from one of the oldest families in France ; nevertheless, he was in no haste to do so, being satisfied to wait in order to justify his high aims until he had gained the important post of *Minister de la Justice*, to which position the Duc de Gerçy was making strong efforts to have him appointed.

And then there was in the life of this young man—whose instincts were naturally good, and who had, above all, a tender heart—qualities that the example of old Trincart and the sceptical teaching of the Duc de Gerçy, who had never hidden from him that the said Trincart was only a father *in partibus extra . . .* had not contributed not a little to extinguish, there was I say in his life, an idyll which, like a bright oasis in the desert, refreshed both his heart and soul, in the midst of the feverish existence and corruption that the imperial atmosphere was spreading over all Paris.

About six years before the time of which we write, chance had led him to the “*Lilas* ;” the desire, no doubt, to smoke a good cigar after

dinner in the midst of solitude, having something to do with the matter. It was Sunday and a holiday. Night had come. Gay songs and joyous bursts of laughter were heard on all sides ; the fancy occurred to the young spendthrift to mingle with the gay crowd and find out the cause of all this light-hearted gayety which excited his envy.

He dismissed his coachman and groom, telling them that he would find his way back to Paris on foot or take a cab, and went in the direction of a restaurant-garden, brightly lighted, from which shouts of delight could be heard.

Here he found assembled five or six families of workmen,—fathers, mothers and children,—seated at different tables, all working their jaws at a tremendous rate ; they had now arrived at the dessert and *vin ordinaire*, freely mixed with seltzer, passed merrily from hand to hand ; the men hummed a prelude to the concert which was to follow, the peculiarity of the prelude being that every one chose his own air, producing an effect which was, to say the least of it, peculiar. The women, with heightened color, laughed boisterously as they leaned back in their chairs ; while the children, accustomed to dry

bread and the meagre pittance of homely fare, quarrelled over the remains of the repast that had been abandoned by their elders, stuffing themselves at the same time with custards, tarts and sweetmeats (candies).

A joyous feast of the humbler working classes —who can only afford to indulge themselves from time to time,—which, after awakening a smile, brings tears to the eyes of the man with a heart open to sympathize with the hopes and sorrows of others, and capable of realizing that those of these poor disinherited ones who wish to do honor to their business and bring up their families respectably, are scarcely ever able to enjoy these moments of indifference and forgetfulness more than two or three times a year.

Paul de Marsay had given a glance around for an empty place to seat himself, but all were occupied, and he was going to retire, when a loud voice call out:

“ Come now, children, sit closer up here, and make room for this gentleman.”

Paul de Marsay turned round at the sound of plates being noisily moved, thanked them as he nodded courteously, and seated himself at the far end of the table, where a space had been

cleared for him, and asked for all that was necessary to make a cup of tea, which he intended making for himself.

The master of the establishment on seeing a young man of distinguished appearance and fashionably dressed enter his restaurant, had left his other duties for the purpose of waiting upon him himself, and the others present, especially the women, looked at him with that simple admiration which the lower working classes profess for those whose superiority they instinctively accept.

Paul de Marsay was undoubtedly one of the most attractive and handsome young men to be seen, having a fine figure, rather above than below the middle height, and although slim in appearance, the picture of health and strength. . . . He inherited also from his mother a beauty of rare perfection for a man, which never failed to captivate the attention of women. Paul de Marsay was aware of this, but was not in the least vain, for he was neither a fop nor an imbecile, although on account of his peculiar surroundings he was both unscrupulous and unprincipled.

His presence had, at first, occasioned, if not

coldness, at least a certain restraint, which put a check for the moment on the frank gayety which had attracted him. But when they saw him pet the children, and call in a travelling toy merchant, whose small stock he soon reduced, to the great delight of the little ones, every voice concurred in pronouncing him a gentleman of the proper sort, and when he threw twenty francs to the merchant, refusing to accept any change, there arose a concert of eulogy which although discreetly uttered, managed to reach his ears. The ice was broken.

Some insinuated that he must be, at least, a lawyer's clerk, unless, indeed, he was one of the employees of the Grand Magasin du Louvre.

Paul de Marsay could not repress smiling inwardly at these amusing suppositions, but he was sufficiently quick witted not to undeceive these good people. This opinion besides served other projects which he had been vaguely forming for the past few moments, and which was another reason for leaving them in their ignorance.

Almost facing him was a beautiful young girl of about eighteen years of age, with a pure child-like complexion, who since his arrival had

attracted his attention. Magnificent pale brown hair naturally waved round a perfectly formed oval face, a straight finely chiselled nose, a mouth as fresh as an opening pomegranate, displaying teeth of ivory whiteness; dark eyes shaded by lashes and eyebrows of the same shade, a singularity rarely met with in a blonde and which added to the attractiveness of her appearance; fresh rosy cheeks, which at the slightest smile discovered to view two charming dimples, completed a picture of such perfection as might have moved a man of stone.

As a prime connoisseur in such matters, De Marsay appreciated, at the first glance, this perfect flower, which seemed to have lost its way in a crowd of deformed, coarse arbutus. On finding herself observed, the young girl blushed, and the bright crimson which spread over face and neck added to the charm which seemed to pervade her whole being.

The songs of gayety had recommenced with renewed energy, and thanks to the animation of the guests, the young man had been able to admire, at his ease, his charming neighbor, without attracting the attention of those present.

At a given moment, a fat, jolly-looking mother

of a family, who occupied the other end of the table near her husband, called out to the young girl, and thus made known her name to De Marsay.

"Charlotte," she said to her, "look after your brothers, they are eating and drinking too much, and will make themselves ill."

"They will not listen to me, mother," replied the young girl, "they are pretending to drink wine without water like their uncle, the soldier at the barracks of Noisy."

A general laugh greeted this answer, and one of the guests drank to the health of the little soldiers who, quite proud of their success, after having touched glasses with their parents, offered to do the same *with the gentleman*."

Paul de Marsay consented graciously, and even accepted a glass of the wine offered to him, on condition of being allowed to return the compliment. This was too much in conformity with the habits of the workmen to refuse, and Paul immediately ordered four bottles of champagne.

He made a sign to the proprietor of the establishment, and the thick tumblers and red wine disappeared as if by magic, giving place to

gracefully formed tall bottles and wide crystal glasses.

To the first bottles, consumed like pure water, came others in quick succession, and the treacherous liquor soon began to enliven the brains of the partakers.

The young man had drawn his chair nearer to his young neighbor, and so managed that her glass was never empty then began the round of all the old patriotic songs still preserved in the memory of the people.

Paul de Marsay profited by the enthusiasm caused by the champagne and the singing to speak to Charlotte and sow in her pure and defenceless heart the first seeds of love. . . . What did he say to her? Alas! it was not very difficult to disturb the simple serenity of her thoughts! Is there any young girl of sixteen who does not desire to love and be told she is loved in return? He told her that he had remarked her for a long time past, but had never dared to accost her and declare his sentiments; that at last, this evening, not being able to bear it any longer, he had determined to make a supreme effort to learn his fate; his intentions were pure, and his own position in life was not above hers.

What was it after all to be a lawyer's clerk? an ordinary employee earning his living among the common crowd; there was no distance in reality between them. . . . One word from her lips would render him eternally happy or miserable. . . . He was bending over her, young, handsome, fascinating, breathing with infernal skill a deadly poison in the heart of the helpless, innocent girl . . . and all the time the parents continued to sing and saw nothing. . . . What was natural to happen—did happen! The young girl allowed herself to yield with all her heart to the new sentiments which Paul—bright, young, handsome—awoke within her, and that evening they exchanged vows of love.

Paul de Marsay had lost his heart while speaking to this beautiful and pure-minded girl, and found that he had learned to love her with an ardor unknown to him until then.

I pass over the secret marriage that followed. Some months after, poor Charlotte, afraid of the consequences of her marriage, which began to be visible, carried out the solicitations of her lover, and did not return to the paternal roof.

Paul de Marsay, who had continued to pass as a lawyer's clerk with some little competence

possessed apart from his salary, had installed the young girl in a charming little villa in the neighborhood of Palaiseau, near the railroad of Sceaux, certain that in this unfrequented spot no one would come to disturb the tranquility of their life.

Charlotte had successively given birth to four children, a boy and three girls, and Paul, whose love for her had only increased—a rare occurrence for a man of his stamp—continued to pass all his spare time with her, and surrounded her with every mark of affection and care. The young mother lived quietly and in comfort, without show or display; a cook, a housemaid and nurse composed the establishment; and she was not astonished at being able to afford all this ease, for Paul Seguin (this was the name De Marsay had given her as his) had told her that he had made a great deal of money in his business, and that had been sufficient for Charlotte, who believed in him blindly.

The young woman was altogether without anxiety as to the future; the delay in acknowledging his marriage was attributed to the obstinacy of an elderly mother who entertained other views for her son, and whom Paul did not

wish to offend, but all would end for the best, and Charlotte would have been completely happy if, from time to time, her thoughts had not reverted to her home at the Lilas, which she had never re-entered! What had become of them all during these five years—her father, mother and little brothers? Tears would then fill her eyes, but Paul would kiss them away. The hour would yet come when she would ask for and obtain pardon! and how happy every one would be then! and Charlotte would allow herself to be easily persuaded, and continued to live in the hope that this long-desired day would soon come.

Yet the morning of the day that Paul de Marsay was to dine with Monsieur d' Alpujar he had left her a prey to sad presentiments. The evening before some very doubtful looking characters had been noticed wandering around the house, and she could not avoid feeling alarmed at the thought that Paul would not return until the following night—the latter had, in fact, left under the pretext of having to accompany his mother on a short journey; but although she was quite accustomed to these frequent absences, and Paul never neglected her

comforts or pleasures, she most earnestly regretted his absence on that particular night.

Paul had only laughed at what he called her nervous impressions, but during all the day he also had felt dispirited and uneasy. He felt as if some misfortune, which he was powerless to avert, hung over his head, and in the evening, when he arrived at the Portuguese ambassador's, these dark thoughts had not entirely disappeared. But soon, the gayety of the guests, the delicacy of the repast, and the generous wines to be found on his host's table, soon enabled him to recover his habitual cheerfulness.

His depression of spirits had not escaped the notice of his friend Emmanuel de Castro, for at the moment when the guests passed into the smoking-room, the young Portuguese nobleman, passing his arm familiarly under the young man's, and drawing him into a corner of the room, said to him in a tone full of interest :

“What is the matter with you this evening, Paul? you seem to me sad and preoccupied!”

“There is nothing the matter, absolutely nothing, my dear Emmanuel,” replied De Marsay, “or . . . well, there is a very trifling affair, a little

family matter of no importance whatever, it is not worth a thought. . . .”

“I am delighted to find myself mistaken,” replied the young Portuguese, fixing a penetrating look on De Marsay. . . . I had imagined something more serious. . . . You know, Paul, if I can do anything to help you . . .?”

“Thanks for your kindness, my dear fellow; I shall not forget it, not for the purpose of reminding you of your promise, but to increase my affection for you.”

At this moment the voice of the Duc d'Alpujar called his guests to put their conversation to an end. The attendants had arranged the table for a game of baccarat and each one was invited to take his place.

They played an informal game at the house of the Portuguese Ambassador, and the players were celebrated throughout all Paris. One night, De Dampmart-Conti and the Turkish Ambassador had challenged each other to a game of écarté; the stakes were to be a million aside for five points, without revenge; the onlookers, in order to prolong the excitement, induced them to make the game eleven instead of five points. Each of the two adversaries deposited on

the table a check for a million francs, and the game commenced. The Turk arrived at ten points and De Dampmart at eight; but it was the latter's turn to deal the cards. He marked the king and made the flam; the man from the Bosphorus was beaten! But the following night Khalil-Bey had his revenge, and gained in addition five hundred thousand francs from his adversary.

On another occasion, irritated by the boasting of the Ottoman, De Saulze defied him to accept the wager he would propose. Word of honor being exchanged on both sides, De Saulze offered to play him five points for his life against his own; the loser to blow out his own brains. The Turkish Ambassador accepted, and the two fools, placing their revolvers beside them, began to play with the utmost *sang froid*; their host, however, interfered, and with some difficulty the game was put a stop to.

These two examples will suffice to show to what point the salons of the Duc d' Alpujar must have occupied public attention.

De Marsay was a reckless player. He punted and held the bank with various fortune; but luck ended by favoring him, and at three o'clock

in the morning he had won two hundred thousand francs from the Duc de Dampmart-Conti, who had had a disastrous bank.

The greater number of the players, who had not moved since ten o'clock in the evening, gave evident signs of fatigue. Urged on by this evil genius, De Marsay proposed to give the duke his revenge at *écarté*; the former accepted with the same coolness he had displayed during the whole night. He was the *beau ideal* of a player, nothing ruffling the cool equanimity of his temper. Bearing one of the greatest names in France, and with a fortune which all his extravagance could not impair, he was always gay, smiling, and at the disposition of any one who wished to gain a hundred thousand francs from him. His income was popularly supposed to be ten millions, and this figure was considerably below the truth.

De Marsay, who felt himself in a vein of luck, wished to try and gain as much as would enable him to complete five hundred thousand francs in order to put aside one hundred thousand for each of his children and their mother, so that he might be able to disclose his marriage when the

opportunity occurred, and assume without trouble the style due to his social position.

The occasion then appeared to him an excellent one to set at rest his apprehensions about the future ; he felt himself in a vein of luck and resolved to profit by it.

Emmanuel de Castro, who kept a jealous watch over his every movement, had almost a look of exultation on his features when he saw him propose to the Duke to continue the game at *écarté*, and he exchanged an almost imperceptible sign of intelligence with this latter, the meaning of which could be only understood by themselves.

The attendants brought a small table, a celebrated one, for it was the same on which the mad games had been played, which had been the talk of all Paris, renewed the wax candles, placed on either side of the table a fresh pack of cards, and the Duke, seating himself opposite Paul, pronounced the sacramental words :

“ What shall we play for ? ”

“ What have you lost, Duke ? ” replied De Marsay.

“ Oh ! a mere trifle ! not quite three hundred thousand francs, of which you have had two.

We will play, if agreeable to you, three games of seven points for a hundred thousand each ; that will give us time to amuse ourselves."

"I accept."

De Marsay was exultant ! three hundred thousand francs ! It was just the sum he wanted !

"Let us see which deals," said the Duke, as he turned up the queen of spades.

"Fortune is in your favor," replied De Marsay smiling, and he turned up a card.

It was the king of diamonds.

"In this case it has changed quickly," said the Duke, also smiling ; "it is not without reason that the feminine gender has been assigned to her, for she is, at the best, as inconstant as a woman. It is your lead, my dear fellow."

De Marsay began the game still smiling ; he had two hundred thousand francs in his pocket. Was he not getting on swimmingly ? At the worst, he was only risking the loss of a hundred thousand francs, and what was that in the balance against the hope of winning a half million ? In case of bad luck, he would come off clear by drawing once more on old father Trincart's cash-

box ; the old banker had never yet left his grandson in the lurch.

The game commenced quietly, gravely, like two honest tradesmen playing for a few centimes ; but De Marsay quickly perceived that his good luck was not going to follow him as it had done at baccarat. In three hands he lost the first point ; that diminished his assurance, but he did not abandon all hope yet. He gained the second, less brilliantly than the Duke, but still he won.

The third and last game ! A slight shiver passed over De Marsay as he received his cards. At that moment he would have withdrawn had it been possible ; two hundred thousand francs would have been a nice little sum to carry away.

He looked at his hand : five bad cards.

“*J'en demande*,”* he said, slightly agitated.

“ Play, sir,” replied the Duke, in his quiet voice. “ I mark the king.”

De Marsay saw trouble before him this time ; this deal he did not make a point. It was his deal : he paid back the Duke in his own coin by marking the king and winning the flam. The game went on more slowly. The game was now

* “ I ask !”

six points each ; Paul was dealing ; he began to breathe more freely.

He turned up the seven of spades and carefully looked at his hand. He made a strong effort not to change color ; he had five diamonds headed by the queen. If the Duke did not ask he was lost. De Dampmart hesitated. . . . he glanced quickly and keenly at his adversary, and saw an involuntary quiver pass over his lips.

“ I play,” he said quietly, and led the seven of clubs.

For a moment, De Marsay felt faint ; this master-stroke of imprudent play ruined him. He had nothing to play with, and soon disclosed the poverty of his hand to his adversary. At this supreme moment, he, a magistrate, could sympathize with criminals ; if he could he would have strangled this man seated there opposite to him, smiling, cool, and impassible. The only thing left for him to attempt he did : He threw away the queen of diamonds, his strongest card, in order to lead his adversary to suppose that it was the only one he had, and in the hope of drawing a small diamond from him if he had one.

But the Duke, still smiling :
“ Eight of clubs !”

De Marsay followed with his seven of diamonds.

“Nine of clubs,” continued the Duke, continuing the suit.

Paul threw down his cards: he had lost.

Quite indifferent, without allowing the slightest sign of elation to escape him, the Duke let fall three words:

“Double or quits.”

His good angel whispered to him: “Get up and go away! . . . You can pay this sum, to-morrow, before mid-day; old Trincart will give you the hundred thousand francs you need.” . . .

. . . . But when did a player ever listen to the voice of prudence? De Marsay remained, and two hours later, he owed twelve hundred thousand francs, as a debt of honor to the Duc de Dampmart-Conti.

“Double or quits,” repeated the Duke.

And, to those who knew him well, there was the suspicion of a sneer in his voice.

“No, that is enough,” replied the unfortunate young magistrate, rising from the table. “I will pay you, Duke, to-morrow, before noon.”

And he left the house, staggering like a drunken man.

Paul had not taken ten steps in the street, his hat in his hand, to allow the fresh, cool air to pass over his heated brain, which felt on fire, when he felt someone seize him familiarly by the arm. He turned round quickly and confronted Emmanuel de Castro.

“It is hardly kind, my dear Paul,” said the Portuguese to him, with a smile full of sympathy. “No, indeed, it is not kind of you to run away from your friends in that way when you are in trouble.”

“You are right. I am in trouble,” replied De Marsay, with a glimmering of hope.

He had just recalled to mind Emmanuel’s offered services to him a few hours before.

“It is precisely when one is in trouble that you ought to have confidence in your friend; come, try and be calm. I understand your difficulty. You do not wish to ask your people for such a large sum at once; am I not right? Well, then, return home, take a hot bath, rest as well as you can, then come to me at ten o’clock, and I will lend you this sum you have lost.”

“Ah! my friend,” replied the young man, grasping his hands in a state of frenzy, “you have saved my life; a few months will enable me

to repay you. Thanks! It would have been quite impossible for me to have found a million in a few hours."

"Then that is arranged," said the Portuguese in his soft, deep voice; and he returned to the hotel d'Alpujar.

Transported with joy, De Marsay hailed a carriage which was passing and drove home.

At ten o'clock precisely he presented himself at the De Castro mansion.

"Ah! Monsieur, what a misfortune," said the concierge to him. "While testing a revolver this morning, Monsieur Emmanuel got his right hand badly injured. Fortunately, there was a doctor at hand, living opposite to us, who immediately dressed it. Had it not been for that, I do not know what might have happened, for it bled very much. He is in bed just now, and has refused to see any one but you."

During this speech, which seemed, one would imagine, purposely calculated to make the unfortunate De Marsay pass from the extremity of hope to the depths of despair, a negro, who had descended noiselessly at the sound of the bell,—a regular Hercules of the race of Yoloff, and Emmanuel's confidential valet,—made a sign

to him, for he was a mute, that his master was waiting to see him.

De Marsay breathed freely.

Emmanuel de Castro, extended on his bed, his right arm bandaged up and resting on a pillow, held out his left hand to the newcomer, saying :

“ It is nothing, my dear fellow, and the doctor assures me that there will only be a very slight mark visible; but I had a narrow escape; a splinter from the revolver carried off my hat; an inch nearer and it would have lodged in my brain.”

“ Ah! then it is not so bad as I feared,” said De Marsay, who looked very pale. “ I thought the wound much more dangerous.”

“ How glad I am to see you!” continued Emmanuel. “ I was beginning to feel lonely. Now I think of it, let me put an end to your anxieties at once. This cursed accident prevents me from writing; but you can do it for me. Will you pass me my check-book, which you will find there on that étagère?”

“ Here it is,” said De Marsay looking radiant, as he handed it to him.

“ No, keep it. Place yourself there at that

small table; you will find everything you require there for writing."

De Marsay mechanically followed the directions given him.

"There, now," continued the Portuguese, "you are settled. What sum shall we say?"

"One million only, since I already have the two hundred thousand francs."

"No, that won't do. Come, be frank with me; by the manner in which you played, I imagined you were in need of money."

"I assure you"

"You have no confidence in me?"

"Well, then, I did want five hundred thousand francs for a little matter that I can perfectly well dispense with."

"But, if I insist that you do not deprive yourself of it! Come, fill in the check for one million five hundred thousand francs, payable to Monsieur Paul de Marsay. . . . Have you finished?"

"In truth, I dare not!"

"I insist I am determined to have my own way in this matter."

"Very well, then, since I must. . . ."

"Good, now pass me the check and let me see

if I can write with my left hand. . . . Impossible. . . . I would never have believed that it was such a difficult matter to write with a hand not accustomed to it. . . . You will have to sign this check for me."

"For you? . . . But it would be forgery!"

"What a forgery? . . . With my consent it is not a forgery, my dear fellow; I have studied law."

"Could not your brother. . . ."

"No, I want this business to be kept private between us two. . . . I really do not comprehend your scruples. Besides, you will have to add my seal, a thing I always do when the sum is a very large one; and in order to keep your mind tranquil in the matter, after lunch,—for you will stay with me, otherwise I shall have no appetite,—we will write out a memorandum that the check has been signed by you at my request."

That would put everything into regular form, and De Marsay yielded. Emmanuel showed him his signature in a book from his library, which De Marsay copied at the bottom of the check, without trying to imitate it very accurately. The seal was then affixed; the check was perfect. Emmanuel rang.

“Order the carriage,” he said to the black, when he presented himself, “and drive Monsieur de Marsay to our bankers, Eusebio Muranda ; then go wherever he desires you, and bring him back here to—lunch.”

“I have my carriage downstairs.”

“Send it away. You are my prisoner until this evening. You surely will not refuse to take pity on a poor lonely devil !”

“Oh ! can you think for. . . .”

“Go at once ; in spite of my wound, I have the appetite of a hunter.”

At half-past twelve, the hour mentioned by Emmanuel de Castro, Paul de Marsay had returned, his face bright with happiness, and it was with sincere emotion that he thanked his friend, not only for the service he had just received from him, but also for the chivalrous manner in which it had been rendered.

“Do not say anything more about it if you do not wish to annoy me,” replied the Portuguese noble. “And now, suppose we order lunch ; there is nothing like being shot in the hand to give one an appetite.”

When, lunch being over, Paul spoke about

the memorandum that was to be written out, his friend replied :

“ But we have never reflected, my dear fellow, that no memorandum we can draw up will alter the facts of the case.”

“ How is that ?”

“ Why, that you really have signed for me. Let us wait until I am all right again, which will be in a very few days.”

“ I will offer up the most sincere prayers for your speedy recovery ; nevertheless, as according to the old proverb : ‘ *Ni qui vit ni qui meurt*,’* I will write out a receipt for the money you lent me.”

“ As you like, my dear fellow.”

“ Now, as to the memorandum which is to serve as a guarantee. We could send for a notary who will receive your affidavit in the presence of witnesses, and in that way there would be no necessity for you to sign.”

“ You forget, my dear fellow, that we would be obliged to take the notary into our confidence, and I have already said that I particularly wish this little matter to remain a secret

* “ We never know who may die or who may live.”

between us. We will regulate all that, I promise you, after my recovery."

De Marsay was obliged to yield, and inwardly went into raptures over the greatness of soul and generosity of his friend ; and when evening came he left for Palaiseau, happy at heart, anticipating with delight his return to his wife and children.

He would not have felt so perfectly happy or tranquil in mind could he have witnessed the scene that took place immediately after his departure from the Hotel de Castro ! He had hardly, in fact, left the house, when Emmanuel jumped out of bed, throwing off all the bandages and linen with which his black valet Ali had skillfully wrapped up his arm, and began to dress.

At the same moment his brother came in.

" Well !" said the newcomer, " how did you get on ? Did he suspect anything ? "

" Absolutely nothing ! we have him in our power, as well as his old rascal of a father," replied Emmanuel.

Then Alvarez sententiously and with his eyes flashing hatred, muttered :

“Vengeance costs dear, but it is sweet to the taste. . . .”

The very next day the Chief Detective, Froler, received a private communication requesting him to call at Messrs. Eusebio Muranda & Co., Bankers, Rue Castiglione, who wished to confer with him on a matter of urgent importance. He hastened to obey the summons, and when he arrived there the head of the firm informed him that on the forenoon of the previous day they had paid at the bank a sum of fifteen hundred thousand francs to Monsieur Paul de Marsay on the presentation by him of a check bearing the forged signature of Monsieur Emmanuel de Castro, and they requested him in his capacity as Chief Detective to negotiate discreetly for the reimbursement of the amount of the check by his family, under penalty, in case of refusal, of having Monsieur Paul de Marsay indicted for forgery before the Procureur General.

Froler accepted the mission with delight, and presented himself without delay at the office of the old magistrate of the Supreme Court, father of the accused, whom he informed without preparation of any kind of the crime his son was

accused of, and enlightening him as to the consequences which would be entailed on the latter should his family refuse to refund the fifteen hundred thousand francs to the bankers, the present holders of the forged check, Monsieur Emmanuel de Castro having refused to allow the firm to debit him with the amount, seeing that he had not signed the check nor authorized them in any way to pay the money.

Before consenting to believe in the truth of this accusation, Messrs. Eusebio Muranda & Co. had submitted the check for examination to an expert, who had pronounced the signature to be a bad imitation of Monsieur de Castro's writing, which, of course, made the bank responsible for the full amount to Monsieur Emmanuel de Castro.

At this news, Monsieur de Marsay at first thought himself the dupe of some mystification, but Froler having again gone over the details of the transaction, and having shown him the check, the unhappy father was compelled to accept the evidence, and he requested a delay of a month to pay the debt. In spite of his supplications he could not obtain a respite of more than forty-eight hours.

Having then ordered his son's immediate

attendance on him, the latter, who was in Court at the time, hastened to obey his father's request.

"Ah! unhappy boy, what is this you have done?" cried the poor father on seeing him.

"Explain yourself, in the name of heaven! You terrify me."

"Did you not present a check for fifteen hundred thousand francs at Eusebio Muranda & Co.'s, the Portuguese bankers?"

"What! You know about it?"

"Answer."

"Yes, father, a debt of honor contracted at cards! I lost my head, and allowed myself to be carried away."

"To commit a forgery?"

"A forgery! what are you saying? Emmanuel de Castro offered to lend me a sum of money which I accepted, and drew the money from Eusebio Muranda's on presenting his check for the amount."

"You can swear that?"

"Father, I am no better than three-fourths of the men of my generation, who sacrifice everything to their pleasures, but I have never forfeited either my honor or my word."

"Ah! then I can breathe freely once more. I

m.gnt have known that Froler would have exaggerated the importance of the thing, for. . . .”

“What has Froler to do with the matter, father?” interrupted the young man.

“He came here to tell me that a charge of forgery was going to be made against you if the fifteen hundred thousand francs were not refunded to Eusebio Muranda & Co. within forty-eight hours.”

At these words Paul turned pale; yet he did not comprehend all the frightful truth.

“A forgery! I, a forger! It is impossible, father.”

“Oh! I ought to have known as well as you that it was impossible. Oh! oh! oh! a De Mar-say, a forger!”

And the old man laughed hysterically.

“The villain,” he continued, “has tried to make sport of us; but I will see De Vergennes and have him dismissed. . . . Come, my son, explain all that passed to me.”

“It is very simple, father.”

Then, instead of continuing, the young man gave a suppressed cry and struck his forehead with his hands. . . . He had just had a gleam of the atrocious truth. . . . or rather he thought

he had, for he would not allow himself to believe it yet.

“No! No!” he said. “Emmanuel could not be guilty of such an abuse of confidence; it would be too monstrous.”

“What do you mean?” demanded his father anxiously. “I implore you not to leave me in the painful position of supposing everything and yet not knowing what to believe.”

Paul then forced himself to regain a little of his ordinary coolness, and gave a faithful account of all that had happened, from the moment of his arrival at the residence of the Portuguese Ambassador, to the occurrences on the following day at Emmanuel de Castro’s: the loan of the fifteen hundred thousand francs, the manner in which the check had been signed on account of the wound the Portuguese was suffering from, and at last, his payment of the money to the Duc de Dampmart-Conti, and his return to the Hotel de Castro, which he only left at four o’clock in the afternoon.

While his son was speaking, the old judge had gradually regained his composure, for, as the recital advanced, he comprehended that he would require all his energy and skill to ward

off the terrible blow which had just fallen on his son.

“Paul,” he said to him without the slightest hesitation when the latter had concluded, “I very much fear you have been the victim of an odious plot.”

“Ah! father! the same thought has come to me also! but do you see how difficult that is to admit, and at the same time, how illogical? To execute such a vengeance, reasons for very powerful hatred must exist against someone, and Emmanuel de Castro and I are on perfectly friendly terms; neither have we ever had the slightest misunderstanding. Such conduct could only be understood as a love of doing evil for evil’s sake; such things do not happen in our world, father.”

“I cannot see, I admit, why these Portuguese should try to ruin you; yet I ought to inform you of one serious matter so serious that it makes me shiver, for if I am not mistaken it will prove beyond a doubt that you have been inveigled into a trap!”

“And this thing, father? Oh! what suffering you cause me by your reticence!”

“ Well, it was the presence, last evening, of your friend Emmanuel de Castro at the opera !”

“ You have been misinformed, father ; he was not in a state to leave his bed on account of his wound.”

“ I am not alluding to anything that was told me ; I saw him myself !”

“ Then he had his arm in a sling.”

“ No, he bore no evidence about him of having been wounded.”

“ There must be some mistake, father ; it is impossible ! Not knowing them very well, you have taken Alvarez for Emmanuel”

“ That is very possible, but there is a means of deciding the matter, and that is to go and see De Castro.”

“ I was going to propose it, father ; my carriage is waiting at the door.”

A few moments later, they learned with astonishment, that the two Portuguese had gone on a journey likely to last some months.

“ What ! and Monsieur Emmanuel still suffering from his wound ?” exclaimed Paul de Marsay.

“ Monsieur is mistaken,” replied the person who had answered their summons ; “ there is

nothing the matter with Monsieur Emmanuel, he is perfectly well, and has not received any wound."

The unlucky De Marsay hardly knew what to think or believe.

"No wound," he repeated mechanically, "but then!"

"Then, my son," said the old judge with dignity, "you have been the dupe of unprincipled adventurers who now hide themselves like cowards so as to avoid being called to account for their conduct. . . . Come! there is only one way of doing business with people of that class —pay them, discussion is out of the question. . . . Come, my son; to-morrow these people will be indemnified."

"Monsieur le Comte," said at this moment the person who had received them, "would you allow me to say a few words to you in private?"

"The attendants of these"

"I am not their attendant."

"Who are you, sir, may I ask?"

And the old judge remarked what his disturbed state of feelings had prevented him from seeing before, that the stranger was a man of

distinguished appearance, and evidently a gentleman.

"I am first secretary to the Portuguese Embassy, Monsieur."

The old man bowed, and passed into the small private office indicated to him by the secretary.

When he came out again, he was frightfully pale, and concealed some object, which his son could not see, under his overcoat.

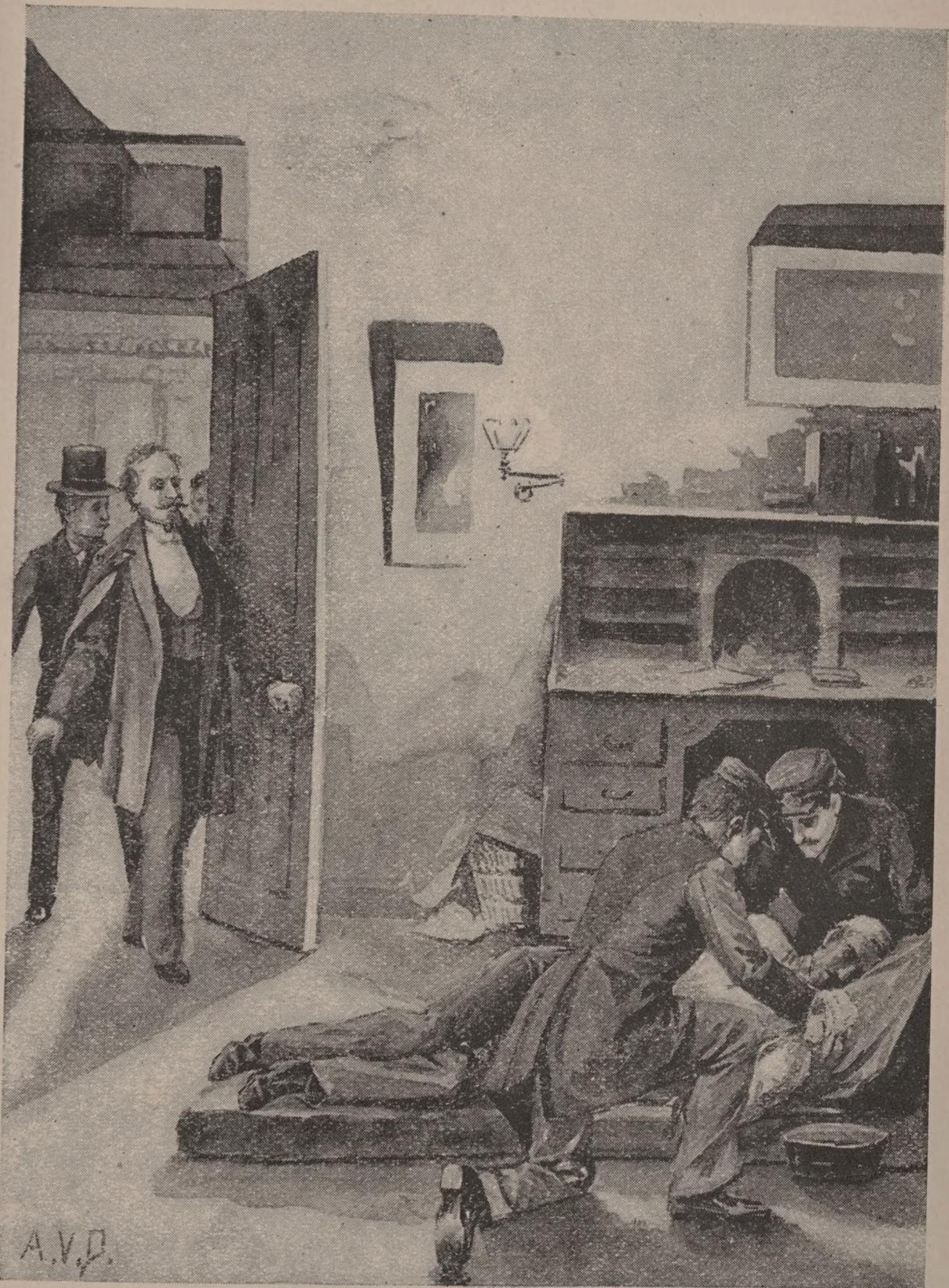
"What is the matter with you, father?" asked the young man, whom inward rage and indignation helped to support.

"Nothing, my son, but the conviction that these men are capable of anything. . . . Do not trouble yourself about the matter any longer. I will undertake to find the necessary money to indemnify these people."

"I only paid a million to the Duke, father; the remaining five hundred thousand francs, which I destined for another purpose, are untouched. I will send them on to you."

"Very well, my son. Now, I have one thing to ask you. I have a good many different places to visit . . . alone!"

"And you would like to make use of my coupé?"



THE DISCOVERY OF THE MURDERED MAN.—*See Part I.*

The old man made a sign of assent.

"At what hour can I see you again, father?"

"Don't come before to-morrow morning. I shall have, I hope, the pleasure of telling you that you are out of these people's clutches."

The old judge made all haste home: he was anxious to know what the little package contained which the ambassador's secretary had handed to him as the legacy of a dying man.

Scarcely had he opened it, when he allowed it to escape from his hands, with a stifled groan.

"Ah!" he cried, "it is vengeance!" then he continued in a lower tone "No, it is the hour of justice that has sounded!"

The object he had received was a simple visiting-card of large size, as was then the fashion, bearing two names and followed by the word:

"Remember!"

CHARLES LEFEVRE.

ERNEST DUTHEIL.

REMEMBER!

Island of Salut

(Cayenne).

“Ah! I do not stand in need of this message to remind me!” moaned the old man; “the remembrance of that deed poisons my life. It is the one infamous action of which I have ever been guilty. It was necessary to save my family from dishonor. . . . and I succumbed. . . . Now they are avenging themselves on my son. . . . but I will defend him. He is innocent! Trincart must hand me over the million I need at once. Was it not he who caused me to sacrifice my loyalty, my duty; whom I saved by bringing to condemnation his two innocent employees! . . . Ah, well! let him aid me now in saving my son, or if not . . . !”

And the old man, shaking his head in a threatening manner, picked up the card that he had

allowed to drop from his hold and put it carefully in his pocket-book. . . .

This same day, about four o'clock, Monsieur de Marsay deposited fifteen hundred thousand francs in the bank of Eusebio Muranda & Co., for which he received a receipt and a letter addressed to Froler, authorizing the Chief Detective to restore to Monsieur de Marsay, Judge of the Supreme Court, the check which had been confided to him by the bankers.

The old man went directly to the Prefecture of Police, he begged that his son-in-law might not be disturbed on his account, and went straight to the Chief Detective's office. Froler, warned of his visit, received him with obsequious deference, and offered his excuses for the cruel mission he had undertaken to fulfill towards him, only that the affair might not be made public, which would have infallibly happened had it been confided to any other hands. As to the check, if he could not restore it at the moment, it was because he had not wished to leave it at the Prefecture at the mercy of any one who happened to be there. The exigencies of the service did not permit him to go home for it at that moment, but if Monsieur de Marsay would

call in that night at eleven o'clock, he would have it ready for him.

Monsieur de Marsay accepted the excuse as sufficient, for he had made up his mind to disguise his annoyance with regard to Froler's conduct until he was in possession of the check which compromised his son's honor, with the intention then of exposing the Detective to the Chief of Police and insisting on his dismissal.

Froler, who also had his own particular end in view, had only appointed this advanced hour of the night in order to be able to discuss matters freely with Monsieur de Marsay, all the employees having left the Prefecture at that hour.

The old judge was punctual. As eleven o'clock struck he knocked quietly at the door of Froler's office, which opened on the passage leading to the Chief of Police's private office. In this way he had avoided passing through the small ante-room, in which some police agents were in waiting. Froler immediately offered him a seat near him. . . . He was at that moment playing with a magnificent Malay dagger, which he held out for the admiration of the newcomer.

"I am a great admirer of weapons," said he

to De Marsay, "and possess a very complete collection at my house. The flame-shaped Malay dagger with the groove made to receive *curare* was wanting, and I have just been made a present of this one."

The detective omitted to tell him that it had been given to him at the Castro Hotel, where he had been that afternoon, and that the two Portuguese had requested him to do his best to keep back the check for forty-eight hours longer, this delay being necessary in order to carry out their ulterior designs.

On his side, Froler was disposed to play a close game on this chance that he might never have again, of effecting a change in his position at the Prefecture for a more lasting seat in the Council of State.

So, not to lose time, he put the question with shameless effrontery.

"Monsieur," he said to the old judge, "I regret to have to announce disappointing news to you, which, however, from your legal experience, you cannot be altogether unprepared for."

"I absolutely fail to comprehend what you mean; will you be good enough to explain, sir,"

replied Monsieur de Marsay, looking at his interlocutor with unfeigned astonishment.

“ Yet it is very simple. You know that public action has not been stopped in this matter, and as you are aware, it is only Monsieur le Procureur General who can pronounce on the case of your son. I am, before all things, a slave to duty, and my duty orders me to lay before the Commissioners the incriminating check and the accusation addressed to me by Messrs. Eusebio Muranda & Co.”

“ Are you speaking seriously, Sir ?” demanded Monsieur de Marsay, laying emphasis on each syllable and looking disdainfully at Froler from head to foot.

“ Quite seriously, Sir,” replied Froler, examining his papers and humming to himself between his teeth, as if to make Monsieur de Marsay understand that he was quite at liberty to withdraw.

“ Well, sir,” replied Monsieur de Marsay, “you are a nice sort of a scoundrel”

“ Sir !”

“ A sneak and a villain, whom I shall have hounded out of the Prefecture within the next hour.”

“By your son-in-law, in order to save your son; as it suits you, my dear Sir, who is neither a sneak nor a villain, but only the father of a forger; as it suits you. We shall have fine sport presently. Be careful to search all the opposition papers to-morrow for the account of the Prefet discharging the Chief Detective because his brother-in-law had forged for the trifling sum of fifteen hundred thousand francs, and that the said Chief, having received a complaint, refused to throw it in the waste-paper basket, because he held out that conformity to the law ought not to be a farce, and that the powerful ought to be equally punished with the weak when they have been guilty of a crime. . . . Hem! what a fine paragraph that will make: the declaration of the Rights of Men, the principles of '89, all will come in for a share, and the Government will be forced to discharge the Chief of Police and to put the Chief Detective in his place, under a general pressure of public opinion and the papers to which. . . . Come now, Monsieur de Marsay, go and tell Monsieur de Vergennes, who happens to be at the Opera; it will not be too long, will it, to wait for his return in order to rid the place of a cowardly sneak like me?”

"It is true, the villain has us in his power," murmured Monsieur de Marsay, overwhelmed with despair; then seized by a sudden idea, he got up: "Well, it can't be helped!" he said, "do your duty," and he went towards the door.

"Stop a moment!" said Froler, as the judge was leaving the room.

"What more can you have to say to me, Sir?" replied the other with dignity.

"How quick you are! You hardly give a man time to draw his breath. Wait a moment. What the devil! it is quite possible to arrive at some understanding."

"What is your price?" retorted the old man, in a tone of withering contempt.

"Oh! no *fafaiux*," replied the detective. . . . "oh! pardon me"

"I understand the expression, Sir. Why give yourself the trouble of apologizing? It suits the class you belong to."

"Bah! words belong to no particular class. You know very well that I have no intention of asking you for money like any common sharper."

"Oh! is there anything else I could offer to you, Froler?"

"Yes, for I am wealthy!"

"A proof that you have not been slow to accept. . . . and then. . . ."

"I would be satisfied with the post of State Councillor."

"Only that!"

"My God, yes! My ambition is a modest one."

The judge drew near. A sudden idea had taken such arbitrary hold of him as to deprive him of all control over himself.

"But even suppose I should agree to this bargain, you can hardly expect me to carry a brevet of State Councillor about with me in my pocket. I must have time to induce my friends to act. . . . The thing is then impossible, for I must have my son's check this very night; to-morrow the exigencies of the case will be increased. You take pleasure in torturing me, and my patience is exhausted. . . . I will go to-morrow and throw myself on the mercy of the President, accompanied by Monsieur de Gerçy, and we shall see if I cannot succeed in closing your mouth and saving my son. . . . So, either the check at once, or. . . . I leave you!"

Froler saw that if the old man adopted the course he suggested he would infallibly succeed,

particularly as the money had been refunded; and then an inquiry would certainly be made; they would find out one circumstance that Paul had omitted to mention to his father, namely, that Emmanuel's black servant had accompanied the young magistrate to the bank, which would put a very equivocal appearance to the accusation.

In addition, the writing of Monsieur de Marsay's son was in no way disguised, and they would find it singular that Muranda & Co. should have paid out such a large sum of money on a check which they must have known was forged. All that might turn out very badly, and it would be better to make use of the present opportunity. A binding promise from Monsieur de Marsay, plainly stating his reasons, would be valuable, and would be quite sufficient for his purpose, so he quickly made up his mind.

“And who spoke of not giving you back the check to-night?”

“Do you agree, then, to give it back?”

“Yes, on a simple promise from you.”

“Monsieur Froler, I will forget everything that has passed if you will make this reparation for the harm you have done me, and you may

rest assured that you will obtain more than mere words from me in return. . . .”

“Oh! wait a moment! it is a written promise that I require. I am not a fool. . . . *Beforehand*, it is always: ‘My dear Froler here, my dear Froler there;’ but *afterwards*: ‘Froler! what is all this about? . . . I know nothing of what you are speaking about!’”

“Oh! the villain! the miserable villain!” said the old man in an aside, not an atom of heart! nothing human under that covering. . . .”

And he convulsively pressed his clenched hand against his breast. A few moments longer and he would lose all restraint over himself. . . . the wild beast, which at certain times is within every man, was gaining the mastery over him. Look after yourself, Froler! there are times when the tamer does not tease his lions; it is when their eyes glitter with a yellow light, when their manes bristle in short violent jerks, when they open and shut their eyes alternately, as if the vision of the vast desert was passing before their gaze and the idea was coming to them gradually to revenge themselves on the one who had deprived them of liberty!

Beware, Froler! Monsieur de Marsay’s eyes

gleam with a yellow light, a continuous shiver agitates his whole body, and his thoughts are wandering on the compensation that individual justice sometimes opposes to the justice meted out by the law.

But Froler was blind !

“ What is this promise ? ” said De Marsay, gradually drawing nearer him with a calm that had almost something terrifying in it.

“ It is very simple,” replied the Chief Detective. “ You must declare that in order to put a stop to the public action which rests with me to put on foot relative to a forgery committed by your son, your promise to obtain my appointment as State Councillor within the next fifteen days.”

“ Is that all ? ”

“ Eh ! my God, yes ! ” replied Froler in a gibing tone. “ I shall content myself with that ; if you fail to keep your word, why then we will recommence the dance.”

“ Very well, then, write,” replied the old man in such a quiet tone that it struck terror into his own heart . . . “ I will sign.”

“ I am glad to hear you speak in that way, and that we understand each other at last.”

Here Froler took a sheet of stamped paper, for he had partly expected this, and began to put down in writing the promise he had indicated verbally.

Monsieur de Marsay had come so near as almost to touch him, as if he wished to look over the detective's shoulder at what he was writing down.

He was ghastly pale, and his hand advanced slowly, stealthily towards the Malay dagger which lay within his reach on the edge of the table Soon he touched it seized it with his right hand and took it up quickly.

"There, that is over!" exclaimed Froler, reading over his paper aloud.

"I, the undersigned, Judge of the Supreme Court, in order to put a stop to any proceedings taken against my son on account of forgery. . . ."

"Die then, miserable hound!" exclaimed Monsieur de Marsay in a choking voice.

And at the same time the dagger disappeared to the hilt in the detective's body.

The blade had entered below the shoulder and passed through the lung and Froler had fallen

an inert mass on the floor without giving a single cry. Without losing an instant, the murderer took possession of the forged check and the promise Froler had been in the act of writing out, and rushing towards the door opposite to the one opening into the ante-room, where he knew some police agents were in attendance, opened it with the rapidity of lightning and stepped quickly into the passage leading to the Secretary's office.

But hurried footsteps were already heard in the office of the murdered man; to fly down this vast corridor he would be seen and pursued he felt that he was lost, and stood quite still, haggard, trembling, not knowing what to do. . . . Two seconds more and they would open the door Oh, welcome sight ! He noticed an outside bolt which Monsieur de Vergennes had had placed to interdict the people belonging to the Detective Force from going through this passage, which conducted to his private apartments, and which he himself had drawn only a few minutes before, when he had gone to see Froler. . . .

He quickly extended his hand and pushed it back in its socket. . . . It was time. The handle

turned in the lock and a stentorian voice cried from the other side :

“ He has pushed the bolt, quick ! go around by the great staircase.”

Without in the least hurrying himself, for he knew he was well in advance, Monsieur de Marsay directed his steps towards his son-in-law’s apartments ; and then, who could dare to accuse him ? He is going precisely the opposite way from where the men of the brigade have hurried in pursuit of the murderer.

On arriving at the apartments, he rang with a *sang froid* which astonished himself. . . . A maid opened the door and uttered an exclamation of pleasure on seeing him, for the old man was much loved in the house :

“ Ah ! it is Monsieur ! Madame’s father ! They have all gone to the opera.”

“ I know it, my girl, but I will wait for my daughter ; the opera must be over by this time.”

And Monsieur de Marsay entered the drawing-room, closing the door after him. . . . He examined himself carefully by the light of the lamp ; not a drop of blood to be seen anywhere ; the dagger remaining in the wound had pre-

vented the blood flowing. . . . There was nothing to fear. . . . he was safe.

Then, at the end of his courage and strength, he allowed himself to sink down on the sofa, where he lay shivering. . . . gasping.

“A murderer! I am a murderer!” he murmured.

But he was again obliged to summon all his energy; a sound of voices was suddenly heard in the ante-room.

Madame de Vergennes and her daughter had returned! . . .

Almost at the same hour that Paul de Marsay had been carried forcibly away on the quay Megisserie, as we already know from the reports of his coachman and the police agents who were making their nightly rounds, two men arrived in a carriage at Palaiseau and asked to speak on matters of importance to Madame Charlotte Seguin on the part of her husband. The servants had at first refused to awaken their mistress, but hearing the voice, Charlotte had rapidly thrown on a dressing-gown and gone down-stairs. The two strangers were fashionably dressed and distinguished in appearance,

so she never for a moment doubted that they had been sent by Paul. She was so agitated, that she did not remark that one of the strangers in particular regarded her with a sudden emotion that he seemed to have considerable difficulty in restraining.

As soon as the newcomers were ushered into the drawing-room, the elder did not wait for Charlotte to ask him the reason of this visit at such an advanced hour of the night, but hastened to explain it to her.

“ Madame,” he said, bowing politely, “ we have been sent by your husband for the purpose of conducting you to him. He left this morning for London, sent there by our employer, for we work in the same office, to arrange some very important legal business, and he had not even a moment in which to warn you; he was obliged on arriving at the office this morning, to jump into a cab, and hasten to the Northern Railway station in order to catch the train for Calais. We are also engaged in the same business as he is, but were not allowed to leave for London so soon; one person alone was sufficient for the production of the different legal documents at the English law Court. Your husband was to

write from London, where he arrived this evening ; but he has reflected, no doubt, on the loneliness of being deprived of the pleasure of your society for such a long time, and changed his mind, for this evening, at ten o'clock, we received the following telegram from him.

““LONDON: seven thirty-five P. M.

““Beg my friends Servet and Robert (that is ourselves, Madame) to have the kindness to bring Madame Seguin with them to-morrow. Very important and embarrassing business: am obliged to remain longer than I first anticipated.

““(Signed) PAUL SEGUIN.”

“As, in order to accompany us, Madame, you would have to leave Palaiseau by the early morning train, we had no time, you will see, to wait for a more convenient hour to call on you.”

This speech was made in a very natural manner. Why, besides, should she think that they were deceiving her? And then, Paul de Marsay, so as to gain more freedom, was in the habit of absenting himself so frequently, on account of pressing business engagements, that Charlotte, in

the height of her delight, believed all their statements implicitly.

After thanking them warmly for giving themselves so much trouble on her account, she begged them to accept what hospitality she could offer until the next morning, and promised to be ready at the hour indicated.

The villa possessed several spare guest-rooms ; but before retiring to the one placed at their disposal, the elder of the two strangers, who had introduced himself under the name of Servet, requested he might see his friend's children. And Charlotte, happy as all mothers are to win admiration for their progeny, conducted the strangers to the room where the four children were asleep.

Servet remained a long time near their cribs, devouring with his eyes the little creatures who were sleeping so soundly and peacefully. Suddenly his eyes filled with tears, and bending over the babies he kissed them tenderly.

“ You are fond of children, Monsieur ? ” said the young mother, much moved ; “ perhaps you have lost some.”

“ Oh ! yes, Madame, I am very fond of them, and my grief is caused by the loss of a young

daughter, who would have been now just about your age, and like you, was called Charlotte."

"Did it happen a long time ago, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Madame, a very long time ago."

"Ah! how terrible it must be to lose a child by death! it must seem like tearing away a part of the mother's heart. . . ."

"My daughter did not die, Madame; she was carried away from my protecting care when quite a child, and I have never seen her since."

"How you must have suffered!" said the young mother, with a pitying compassion which made her look still more lovely.

As Servet gazed earnestly at her through his tears, he continued with an effort:

"You are kind and good, Madame. Will you try and excuse me if I ask a favor, which I beg you will not allow to offend you; but look at me, my hair is almost white, and I might be the grandfather of your lovely children, so I beg beforehand your forgiveness. . . ."

"Speak, Monsieur, I am certain you will not ask anything I ought to refuse."

"You recall to me so visibly her whom I have lost, that it makes me in a measure happy if you would allow me to give you the father's

kiss I have kept for her during fifteen long years. . . .

Blushing deeply, the young mother hesitated a moment; but Servet was there, his eyes still tearful, standing so respectfully, looking so sad, his age besides, and the reason he gave, pleaded so eloquently in his favor, that she bent her beautiful brow towards him for all answer. . . . Overcome with emotion, the stranger kissed her warmly, and could not resist the impulse which seized him to throw his arms round her and press her to his heart, as he murmured:

“My daughter, my darling Charlotte, if you only knew what your poor father has suffered!”

Far from being annoyed at this display of tenderness, which in her thoughts was addressed to another, Charlotte was moved by it even to tears. She thought, also, of her father, her mother, whom she had left one day never again to see them, and her tears began to flow.

“Have I offended you, Madame?” asked Servet sadly. . . . “Forgive me—for you have given me one of the few rare moments of happiness I have been able to taste in my life. It seemed to me for a few moments as if I held my own daughter pressed against my heart.”

"I am happy on your account, Monsieur, and your fatherly caress could not wound me when I knew the meaning of it."

At this moment, one of the children began to move in his crib as if awakening: this was the signal for retreat.

"One word yet," said Servet to the young mother: "I forgot to tell you that your husband allows you to bring the children if you choose; he understands that you could not leave them behind for any length of time, and he will be happier not to be deprived of their caresses."

"How thoughtful he is," replied Charlotte, with a burst of tenderness. "Thanks for having warned me in time; it would have been too late when they awoke to make all the preparations necessary for a journey."

"Of course, the servants must accompany you. You had better tell them now, madame, so that they may be ready."

Servet and his friend then bowed to Charlotte with all the more respect now that their interview had assumed a more intimate tone, and withdrew to their apartments.

At six o'clock the next morning the whole household were seated in the train at Palaiseau,

and on their arrival at Paris an elegant family carriage awaited them, which in less than twenty minutes conveyed them to the Northern Station.

Servet had telegraphed to secure a deck-cabin on the steamboat, so that the young mother might be alone with her children, although the crossing from Calais to Dover barely lasted an hour and a half. And Charlotte went on board the boat perfectly happy at the thought of being so soon in the arms of Paul, whom she loved so tenderly and not for one single moment did the slightest doubt of the real mission which these two strangers were accomplishing trouble her peace of mind.



PART THIRD.

THE CONVICT'S REVENGE.

When Luce and Heurtloup entered Jacques Laurent's study, preceded by the old detective, they observed the latter take a letter, which was lying open on his desk, replace it in its envelope, then put it away carefully in a locked portfolio, which he kept in one of the drawers of his cash-box.

"You would very much like to know what I have got in there?" observed the old man, smiling.

"Not at all, Chief," replied Luce, "your business is not ours, and"

"Ta! ta! ta!" replied Jacques Laurent, "all this ceremony and fine speeches don't sound natural coming from you to me. . . . You know

as well as I do, Luce, the weaknesses of human nature, and if you tried to deny the fact, I could not believe you. I defy any one, I don't care who he or she may be, to see a letter or telegram slowly folded and put out of their sight, that *nolens volens* as the jurists say, whether they wish it or not, the following reflection does not pass through his mind : 'I should like to know what is in that paper that is being folded so carefully out of sight.' . . . This first thought is common to all men whatever may be their character or education ; but starting from this headline, you can place a crowd of offshoots representing the different roads a man follows according to his temperament, his education or social position. There are as many different associations of ideas as there are people ; thus, to enable you to form an idea, I will tell you what each of you thought, judging from the special knowledge I have of your intelligence, tendencies, and of those little differences so impossible to explain in words, existing between you, and constituting your individuality. I only ask you to be frank with me in return."

"Oh, Chief!" exclaimed the two detectives, who were burning with impatience, thinking of

the precious time the old man was making them lose. But they understood their Chief; they had to put up with his whims if they expected to get anything from him in return.

“ You, Luce,” continued Jacques Laurent imperturbably, “ after the first feeling of curiosity, which I affirm is common to all men, you asked yourself why I locked away this letter in your presence. Was it the fear that you might take a glance at its contents? And you felt wounded because I did not wait until after your departure before putting away a letter which must have been lying there since the delivery of last night’s mail, and which I never saw the necessity of putting away under lock and key before your arrival. . . . Is that not true ?”

“ By my faith, my dear Chief, you are the very devil in person.”

“ As for you, Heurtloup, you have not been my assistant for more than thirty years without knowing you as well as I do myself. Curiosity with you is not very strong, for, before all, you are a man of order and discipline, and you said to yourself: ‘ How the Chief must have changed since he gave up leading an active life, to leave his papers lying about open on his desk,’ and

you concluded vaguely, without perhaps knowing exactly why, that that particular letter must have been of little or no value, while Luce, on the contrary, supposed it to be of the greatest importance. . . . Am I mistaken?"

The two men looked at each astonished and answered almost in the same breath:

"It is marvellous, Chief!"

"One would suppose you could read our inmost thoughts," continued Luce.

"And it must be confessed that rest has not helped to rust you," exclaimed Heurtloup, admiringly.

"In the main," replied the old Detective, "you take all this, perhaps, for idle rambling on my part, for you are impatient to tell me something, I know, but it is this attention to trifles, valueless in appearance, which makes the detective of genius, for it often happens that little facts suddenly assume enormous importance. Thus, among other great matters,—I am only making a supposition, but note it well! . . . suppose that in this very letter the following phrase should occur: 'I announce to you that this evening, between eleven o'clock and mid-

night, Froler will be stabbed in his office at the Prefecture de Police.'"

The two detectives, pale, startled at these words, stood erect, as if moved by the same impulse, uttering an exclamation in which surprise was mingled with something akin to terror.

"What is the matter?" said Jacques Laurent, looking astonished, "one would suppose that you had sworn not to listen to me in peace. I pursue my subject: 'The name of the assassin is unknown, but it is to be found (always a supposition) written at full length in this letter which, lying open on my desk, might have been read by either of you.' Which, I do not know, but were I forced to confess, I would not hesitate, my dear Luce, in saying that with you the curiosity of the detective would outweigh other considerations as well as the spirit of discipline and restraint. While with Heurtloup, the contrary would have been the case, and I would not have been mistaken! Apply this method of analysis and deduction to the research of crime, and you will almost always arrive at satisfactory results. . . . Now, my friends, I shall not leave you in suspense any longer: I did not wish to be interrupted in my preamble, but it is true

the letter of which I have just been speaking announces to me not only the death of Froler last night, but also those of Trincart and the notary Petit-Ledru. What truth is there in all this? I have a particular interest in knowing."

"You have not been misinformed, Chief," responded Luce, "all that they have foretold has come to pass. We came to announce the facts and to tell you besides that young Monsieur de Marsay was, about the same hour, carried off by some unknown people on the Megisserie quay."

"Exactly. That also formed part of the news they gave me."

"Who could possibly have informed you of what had not yet happened?"

"People who apparently had the ordering of these events before they were accomplished. You will know who they are later on."

"These people," replied Luce, "convey the impression to me of bearing a very close resemblance to those who accomplished these events."

"You burn, my friend. In truth, I am proud of my old pupil; but what you do not know, my dear Luce, what you cannot know, is what is contained in the concluding paragraph of this mysterious letter. But listen!"

And Jacques Laurent, having taken out the letter from his portfolio, read aloud :

“‘ This quadruple act of justice accomplished, we beg you, my dear Jacques Laurent, to exert every possible means in your power that the very honorable Monsieur de Vergennes, the Chief of Police, and Luce, who will certainly be promoted to the position of Chief Detective, may not have to suffer the consequences of their failure in the search for the guilty parties, whom they will never succeed in discovering’ ”

“ Your unknown correspondent is advancing rather too quickly,” hazarded Luce.

“ You have a lower opinion of his perspicacity than he has of yours ‘ whom they will never succeed in discovering *officially* ’ which means, it seems to me, that even should you come to know who they are, you will, for some reason or other, hesitate to arrest them. ‘ Monsieur de Vergennes, at this moment,’ listen carefully, this is the concluding sentence of the letter :

“‘ Must not leave the Prefecture de Police. He has been entrusted with a secret mission to save,

at any sacrifice, the Duc de Vergy-Coislin, peer of France, from the scaffold, who was arrested by order of the Minister of Justice about six weeks ago, and over whose head hangs on accusation of assassination. Do then all that human power can accomplish, not only to maintain Monsieur de Vergennes in his position, for we can never forget all the Duke did for us on a memorable occasion, but also to help the latter to escape; spare neither trouble nor gold gold above all, which opens every door. . . . Vengeance and gratitude is the motto we have adopted.'

"Do you understand now? I have given you a lesson on psychology applied to the police *à propos* of this letter—it is a hobby of mine, you must remember, for whatever police duties I attend to now, is done with the head and not with the legs. I have arrested more people here from my study, than all the Chiefs of the Detective's Force who pass their time in running through the streets of Paris,—do you comprehend, I say, that we have not lost our time I know all you wish to tell me, and you know all I have to say. There is nothing left for us to do now but act. In a word, as a summary of all

that has occurred, your brother, Luce, and Ernest Dutheil, who made their escape many long years ago from Guiana, have returned to deal out justice, and to avenge themselves on the scoundrels who were the cause of their condemnation, and to whom they have attributed, not without reason, the sad end of your parents, who succumbed to poverty and grief, as well as the death of Dutheil's sister, your brother's wife. . . .”

“And my niece, Charlotte?”

“She is not dead; I have succeeded in discovering her, and by this time, she is doubtless in her father's arms.”

“May Heaven reward you, Jacques Laurent.”

“Thank you, that is always acceptable. . . . I am one of those who believe in Divine justice. I have always taken a deep interest in your brother's case. He would never have been condemned had I been in the Detective Force. Froler behaved like a scoundrel and a coward, and I will in a measure relieve my feelings by telling you why he deserved death. The villain, on the conclusion of the expert's evidence at your brother's trial, who testified that there was

an evidence of freshness about the books, was commissioned to make a secret and unexpected perquisition in Trincart's bank, at his private house, or anywhere where he considered there was a likelihood of discovering the truth; the villain, I repeat, who was on the right scent, went straight to the chateau of the Duc de Gerçy, at Choisy. The latter was absent. The frightened domestics never offered any resistance to the investigations of the police, and the original books from Trincart's—those which had served for making the new ones, those which proved as clear as day the innocence of the two accused men—were found at the bottom of an old barrel which Froler made them open. The scamp knew how important his discovery was, and was paid *one hundred thousand francs* to hold his tongue. . . . Do you not think he deserved his fate?"

"I was ignorant of all that," replied Luce, pale with indignation. "His death was too easy a punishment for his crime."

"You know by whose hand he died?"

"Yes, by Monsieur de Marsay's, in order to save his son. . . . My brother does not seem to me to have had any hand in this business."

“Directly, no! for it was I who managed the whole affair.”

“That can be easily seen!”

“Always that knowledge of the human heart, my dear fellow. You see in me the chief of the banking firm of Eusebio Muranda & Co. I knew that Froler was capable of anything to obtain a seat in the State Council, and that Monsieur de Marsay would even be capable of a crime to defend his son. The encounter between these two characters was bound to end in a catastrophe.

“It was then that Paul de Marsay was invited to the Comte d' Alpujar's, your brother's intimate friend, Luce.”

“You are surely joking! The ambassador of Portugal, the friend of an escaped convict!”

“I am quite serious, Luce; besides, Charles will tell you a good many things still more surprising. The Duc de Dampmart-Conti, who has a peculiar faculty for marking the king, won a fabulous sum from Paul de Marsay at écarté, which the young man paid with a check of his friend Emmanuel de Castro's, cashed at the bank of Eusebio Murando & Co., which had been brought into existence for this very purpose.

Then it was discovered that the check was apparently a forgery, although Emmanuel had really lent the money to his friend ; but being, as he pretended, wounded in his right hand, he had made young De Marsay, who was the one who benefited, sign the check. So that the actual forgery was not the less indisputable.

“ It was then that I brought Froler on the scene by lodging a formal complaint, and the fellow took such advantage of the situation that De Marsay, Senior, forced to extremities, ended by making himself the instrument of vengeance. You know the rest. . . . I hardly expected to succeed so well, but I repeat to you : ‘ Study the character of men, and you can make them dance like so many puppets’. . . . I have told you, I felt the keenest sympathy for Charles and his brother-in-law, and after their condemnation I did not cease to look after their interests. To effect their escape, I made myself the intermediary between the wealthy banker R. . . . and the Duc de Vergy-Coislin and the American ship-owners who furnished the vessel which received them after their flight from Cayenne. For this purpose I made a special journey to and from New York.

“Ever since, we have kept up a correspondence, and when they returned to France for the purpose of accomplishing their work of justice and avenging reparation, to which they had vowed their lives, it was again I who aided them with my advice and experience, so that they might execute their projects without any danger to their safety.

“We tried the cowardly culprits in secret under the presidency of the Comte d’ Alpujar and Froler, Trincart and Petit-Ledru were condemned to death. I advised that they should be executed the same night, and all the preparations were made. . . .”

“The preparations”

“Certainly ; it was necessary that not one of us should leave the slightest trace The two houses inhabited by Trincart and the lawyer were bought ; all the necessary arrangements were made while these two gentlemen were at the seaside ; a panel in the ceiling of their bedrooms was made to turn in such a fashion as to give free passage to the one who was to execute the sentence, and they waited before fixing the day until the De Marsay-Froler affair was well under way, and the last meeting

arranged between them. As to young De Mar-say, who had something else to answer for, before forty-eight hours, he will have an opportunity of making reparation for his fault."

"You are really astonishing, my dear Chief," exclaimed Luce. "It recalls to one's mind a story from the *Arabian Nights*. It would hardly be possible to believe, did we not know you so well."

"Peuh!" said Jacques Laurent. "All that is only a little amateur police work. . . . In short, I see from the news you have brought me, that, so far, everything has succeeded according to our desires. There is only one other piece of business yet remaining for which I am personally responsible, and of which I have not yet received any news. . . ."

At this moment, as if in answer to this speech, a quick tap was heard at the door. Jacques Laurent went quickly forward and opened it, and a man of tall figure, with a soft felt hat pulled over his eyes, and with a large cloak covering him, head to foot, entered the room.

"Heaven be praised, Monsieur le Duc, you are saved," said the detective.

"Everything has gone on just as we would

have wished," said the newcomer; "the body sent from the dissecting-room was sewn in a mattress that they had gained permission to bring from my house and introduced into the gaol by the connivance of the head-keeper; on entering, the bearers wrote down three names on the register so that the same number might go out again. The corpse, dressed in my clothes, was hanged to the bars of the window of the cell I had been immured in, and thanks to the precaution taken at the registry, I was able to pass out safely, and here I am!"

"You must leave for England this very day, Monieur le Duc, with my two friends here."

"With us?" interrogated Luce in astonishment.

"Yes, you! unless you do, the duke could not embark. His escape will be known by daylight, if it is not known already, and all the ports as well as the frontier will be watched. While in company of the Chief and Sub-Chief of the Detective Force, he absolutely runs no risk."

"But the means of getting to England?"

That is a very simple matter! An order from Monsieur de Vergennes to follow in the track

of young De Marsay's abductors is all you require."

"We will never be able to obtain that after the three assassinations of last night, the perpetrators of which we have yet to discover."

"It is useless to give yourself any further trouble on that score. I have provided for all that. There are, in the pavilion of my garden, at the present moment, three determined fellows whom I generally employ in any particular delicate mission. I have trained them sufficiently, and they are prepared to play for a few days the role of three murderers You must lead them with chains round their necks and manacles on their hands through the secret staircase of the Detective offices at the Prefecture, and while Luce conducts the assassins of Trincart and the lawyer Petit-Ledru to Monsieur de Vergennes, Heurtloup will give the alarm, police agents will hasten to his assistance and they will discover Froler's murderer in a large wooden box, where you can conceal him on entering. All three will declare themselves as belonging to a band called the *Avenging Convicts*, organized for the purpose of avenging themselves on their judges and the police.

Months will be passed in searching for their accomplices, and one fine day, when public opinion has calmed down, we will assist them to escape in their turn.

“Do you think that after this Monsieur de Vergennes will refuse your request for an order to follow in the track of his brother-in-law’s abductors as far as London?”

“No, certainly not!”

“Everything will then go on admirably. You will have your commission written out in this form: ‘The Chief Detective, the Sub-Detective and an agent;’ and with this authority you will take your places in the steamboat without difficulty.”

“What an inventive genius nature has gifted you with, Chief,” replied Luce; “at eighty years of age you surpass us all put together.”

“You know my secret, it depends on yourself alone to put it into execution And now, gentlemen, lose no time; you must take the mail boat from Calais to Dover this evening. . . . Come, I will give you up your prisoners; they only ask for one thing, to be comprised among the list of prisoners who are allowed to smoke, and that they may be allowed to live at

the Canteen. You see they are not unreasonable. They will be careful also to live in such a way as not to forfeit these favors. . . . Another thing I was forgetting. . . .

"At their trial, the evidence will be so perplexing that the most severe sentence they will be likely to receive is banishment from France for a space of ten years, in which case I have assured them an income of eighteen hundred francs a year during their lifetime. It is a mere trifle!"

"You play football with gold, Chief" said Heurtloup, pensively. . . . The poor detective had been dreaming for thirty years of one day retiring on this sum, but had never been able to put aside a sou.

"Your turn will come, old fellow," said Jacques Laurent, who had guessed his thoughts. "If they can pay those who only put in an appearance at Court in this way, just think how they will recompense those who have rendered such serious services as you are about to do."

While speaking, he had opened a door which led into a little passage, and said in the friendly, good-humored tone which never abandoned him :

"Come along, my lambs, it is useless to attempt concealment, your crime is discovered. Submit to your fate quietly."

The three men left the pavilion, where they had been awaiting the moment to enter on the scene, and quietly allowed themselves to be handcuffed ; for it was deemed better to be prepared in case of encountering any of the municipal police on their rounds.

Two hours afterward Luce had returned with his companions furnished with their commission for England, indicating as Jacques Laurent had demanded. . . . "The Chief and Sub-Chief of the Detective Force accompanied by an agent." It was the saving of the *Duc de Vergy-Coislin*.

In the extremity of his delight at learning of the capture made by his subordinates, he had refused them nothing.

"You have saved me, gentlemen," he had said to them, "and rest assured I shall never forget it."

A note had been sent to all the papers announcing the three assassinations at the same time with the capture of the three murderers. The greater number of journals issued a second edition, in which glowing tributes were paid to

the Chief of Police and his subordinates. With one accord they all applauded the skill and vigilance of the Detective Force.

Jacques Laurent was exultant. It was, as he said to himself, one of the finest strokes of business he had ever carried through in his life.

The escape of the Duke was never made public; the authorities profited by the trick which had been employed on them, to announce that he had hanged himself in his cell, which cut short any expression of opinion.

About four o'clock, Luce and Heurtloup came back to accompany the Duke, now properly disguised, in order to accomplish the mission Jacques Laurent had intrusted to them; they were to dine somewhere in the neighborhood of the railway station and take the six o'clock train, which corresponded with the departure of the mail train.

The old Chief handed a sealed letter to Luce, which he was to open in London at the Charing Cross Hotel, where he was directed to put up. This letter contained the three further orders he had promised to execute.

The two detectives and their companion had not turned the corner of the Rue Lepic, when

Jacques Laurent said to himself with an indefinable smile :

“Come now, everything is going on well in Paris; let us see if matters are progressing equally well in London.”

He then entered his dressing-room, spread out on a marble table all the different little jars of salves and unguents which he made use of to disguise himself, and in less than an hour afterwards no one would have recognized the octogenarian in the man of fifty years or thereabouts who left the detective’s house. Jacques Laurent had given to his perfectly white hair, a beautiful tint of red gold, that tint so much prized by the old Venetian masters. He had imparted a bronzed tint to his complexion and parted his beard at the chin, allowing it to flow in long whiskers in the English fashion, which gave him a very high bred appearance. He might have been taken for some general from India come to spend a few months in England.

He had the curiosity to get into the same compartment with Luce and his companions, to enter into conversation with them in an admirably imitated foreign accent, and was not recognized by any of the party. On arriving at the

Charing Cross Hotel, he asked for room No. 75, which he had retained by telegram the evening before, and had not been there five minutes when there was a knock at the door.

“Come in!” he called out in his natural voice.

The door was opened, and Luce, with his two companions, stood before him, quite taken back on recognizing their travelling companion.

“Excuse me, General,” stammered Luce, “we must have made a mistake in the number of the room.”

The sealed letter he had just opened bore these words: “Your further orders will be transmitted to you by a friend at the hotel you put up at, room 75.”

Thoroughly accustomed to the old Chief's manner of doing things, Luce did not experience any astonishment on reading this laconic document, and had tranquilly presented himself at the place indicated.

“Eh! no, you have made no mistake, my dear Luce,” replied Jacques Laurent laughing; “it must be that I have grown considerably younger since yesterday, if you cannot recognize me.”

The three men stood speechless with astonishment in presence of this skillful transformation.

"Your equal will never appear in the Force again," said Luce, shaking his head, "and I cannot understand how you were allowed to retire twenty years ago."

"My dear fellow, it is a lesson which may be profitable to you. I had become more powerful than the Prefet, or even than the Minister of the Interior himself; both, in spite of themselves, had to submit to my influence, and it had to end by their asking me to retire. I accepted the situation and asked to be put on the retired list. . . . But I am gossiping here, and we have no time to lose; it is eleven o'clock now, and lunch is at noon. Do not ask me any questions, for I shall not answer you. Go and dress, don your frock coat and light tie, and then come back here for me; during the time you are away, I shall follow your example."

"Come along," said Luce, "we go from one surprise to another, from mystery to mystery; there is nothing for us but to obey."

An hour later the four men got into a carriage ordered by Jacques Laurent, and shortly after, arrived before a splendid looking mansion in South Kensington. About half a dozen footmen in gorgeous livery were lounging in the

hall, headed by a major domo in the regulation costume.

A man of mature years hastened forward to meet them, and shook hands warmly with Jacques Laurent.

"They are all waiting and ready for you," he said to him in a low voice.

"How has everything gone on?" demanded the latter, in the same tone.

"We cannot say; the young people have not seen each other yet."

"Let us go up quickly, then. But, first, allow me to present my friends to you. Gentlemen, Monsieur le Comte Fernand d' Alpujar, Ambassador of Portugal at Paris. And now, Count, we are ready to follow you."

The newcomers were introduced into a vast drawing-room on the first floor, where everything that could be imagined in the way of luxury and extravagant display was spread around in profusion.

"What or whoever you may hear or see, keep silent!" said Jacques Laurent to his friends. "Those are your orders."

Around a large Louis XV. table were standing in full uniform, Messieurs d' Alpujar, Alva-

rez and Emmanuel de Castro, De Dampmart, the two Trevenenc, and Hubert de Villantrois, captain in the French navy. Near them was seated the sheriff of the county.

“Introduce the young couple,” ordered Monsieur d’Alpujar.

Two doors situated opposite to each other were thrown open and two exclamations were heard at the same time.

“Charlotte!”

“Paul!”

The young woman came forward trembling with emotion. . . .

“You here, Charlotte! what is the meaning of this farce?” cried Paul de Marsay, for it was he.

Then, perceiving the sheriff, whom he recognized by his uniform :

“Ah!” he said, “here is a magistrate!”

Then addressing him :

“Sir, I charge these men here with having carried me away by force from my own country and with having me imprisoned since yesterday. . . .”

“Silence!” interrupted the sheriff, “we must proceed in order. I will listen to anything you have to say later. But first, I must acquaint you

with a charge made against you by Monsieur le Comte d'Alpujar of abducting a young girl under age, named Mademoiselle Charlotte de Castro, his daughter, carried away from her family when a child, and only lately restored to her father's arms."

"I don't at all understand what you are saying!" said the young man, quite bewildered by this revelation; "if it is a comedy you are carrying out, let there be an end to it."

"No, Paul," said Charlotte, running up to him, "it is not a comedy; look, read these papers. I am indeed the daughter of the Count Servet Alvarez de Castro. Do you wish to send me and your children away from you now that we are well-born and rich?"

Overcome with emotion, the young man clasped her in his arms.

"You have only one means to pursue," continued the Sheriff, "to escape the consequences of the charge brought against you, and that is to repair your fault by marriage before us as witnesses."

"He will consent; he does!" cried Charlotte through her tears. And going up to her father,

she took his hand, and drawing him forward, placed it in Paul De Marsay's.

For a moment the two men hesitated, then shook hands warmly, promising in that supreme moment of joy and happiness, total forgetfulness of the past.

In just fifteen minutes more, Charlotte de Castro openly became Countess de Marsay. . . .

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Alvarez de Castro came up to Luce, and drawing him familiarly towards the window :

“Come, Luce, my brother,” he said to him, “we have a great deal to talk about.”

“Charles!” cried the detective, in a voice of suppressed emotion.

“Hush! my dear fellow,” replied Alvarez. . . . “Charles is dead; there is only the Count de Castro, a Portuguese noble, owner of two provinces and a gold mine in Peru!”

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